The Maxims of The Duc de la Rochefoucauld

Translated by
Constantine FitzGibbon

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THE MAXIMS

of

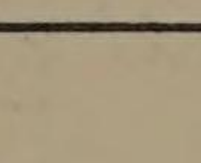
the *DUC de la*

ROCHEFOUCAULD

Translated into English by

CONSTANTINE FITZGIBBON

Together with an INTRODUCTION
and BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION
page 9

THE MAXIMS
page 31

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE
Together with a Note on
This Translation
page 167

INTRODUCTION

THE chaos and the malice of the Fronde, that expense of spirit in a waste of treacherous shame, were over, the real reign of the Sun King had begun, and beneath the splendour of his rays France was entering the flowering Maytime of her glorious summer after a century of chill, Italianate winter. Suddenly all France began to talk.

What they talked and wrote about was the soul of man, for this was the age of Pascal: of the interplay of souls, for this was also the age of Racine: of the comedy of man's pretence, as shown by Molière: of the relationships between men and women in love, and Madame de Lafayette was about to invent the psychological novel with her *Princesse de Clèves.* They also talked at great length about one another, in their salons, in their letters, in the more stylized *portraits*, or what were called in England "characters," which they composed. As so often happens when calm returns after a period of great turbulence, the men and women who survived became, in the sudden silence, acutely conscious of themselves and of one another. Why had it all happened, those wars and treacheries and strange loyalties? What are we, and what are our motives?

Of La Rochefoucauld we know perhaps as much as it is possible to know of any man with whom we have not been intimately linked. His friend, Madame de Sévigné, wrote of him frequently and coolly; his mistress of fifteen years, Madame de Lafayette, wrote about him with great acumen and calm affection; his political enemy, the cardinal de Retz, wrote of him with ironic condescension; he wrote his own *portrait;* and in his works he gave us his views on those matters which he thought would interest and concern his readers. Caught in those converging beams of clear, French light, we see him, the amiable, enchanting, witty, rather melancholy man of the world, man of feeling, man of action, man of thought.

Yet Sainte-Beuve, when he wrote his preface to these *Maxims,* in 1853, said: "It is difficult, in my opinion even impossible, to describe La Rochefoucauld's life in detail." Difficult, because its first half was so complex, its second so placid. Difficult, too, because his most private emotions and actions are not revealed to us. He has said that he disliked familiarity, which he probably regarded as an obstacle, rather than a means, to the sort of understanding that interested him. A gentleman writing for other gentlemen, he assumes that we are not interested in ferreting about in those parts of one another's lives which are rightly played in private, and he passes on. Besides, for the psychologist, which is perhaps the label that fits La Rochefoucauld most neatly, what we do becomes after a while far less

interesting than why we do it. So the man who is revealed to us is the man in the drawing-room. From his behaviour there, a gesture perhaps or a remark casually dropped, it might be possible to speculate about his life in its other apartments. But he himself would have seen little purpose in so doing.

François VI, prince de Marcillac and, after his father's death in 1650, duc de la Rochefoucauld, was born in Paris, in the rue des Petits Champs, on September 15th, 1613. The family is one of the oldest in France, the name being derived from a castle in the province of Angoumois which had been in their possession since at least the eleventh century. This province, for many years subject to the Kings of England, was not formally incorporated into the realm of France until the reign of King Francis I, in 1515. King Francis, immediately and in the same year, ennobled the family of La Rochefoucauld; the first count's father was this king's godfather and he was therefore also named François. The family fought on the Protestant side during the Religious Wars of the sixteenth century, and the great-grandfather of the author of the *Maxims* was murdered on St. Bartholomew's Eve. The grandfather of François VI was a follower of Henri IV, both to Paris and into the Catholic Church. For his services to the Bourbons, and particularly for his ruthless suppression of the Huguenots in Poitou, François V was created *duc et pair* in 1622. They were rich and powerful people, their seat, Verteuil, being one of

the finest examples of French early renaissance architecture.

The sixth François de la Rochefoucauld had very little formal education, being taught by a tutor and not attending any school or university. By the time he was sixteen, he was not only married but a soldier. His wife, who bore him eight children and seems to have been an admirably virtuous woman, is a shadowy figure: his great loves were elsewhere. As for his soldiering, de Retz did not believe that he was of the stuff of which successful commanders are made, but he did command the Regiment d'Auvergne, with great gallantry, from 1635 to 1642 during this phase of the Thirty Years War. His personal courage in the campaigns of Flanders and Italy was celebrated, as was his gallantry. That fascinating intriguer, the duchesse de Chevreuse, became his mistress. When young he might well have stepped out of, or into, the pages of *The Three Musketeers*; as the prince de Marcillac he figures in the memoirs of that Monsieur d'Artagnan whom Dumas turned into the hero of his novel.

At one point Madame de Chevreuse involved him in what appears to have been the first of those chivalrous and extravagant conspiracies which were to be typical of his life as a man of action. Through her he became a supporter of the Queen, Anne of Austria, in her struggle against Richelieu. It was proposed, with the Queen's approval, that he abduct her to Brussels, she to ride pillion behind him. For good

measure, he seems to have planned to kidnap the King's favourite mistress as well. The story leaked out, however, and he received the very mild punishment of eight days confinement in the Bastille: presumably his father had put in a word on his behalf with Louis XIII. But by 1640 the powers at court had had enough of the young man, and he was exiled, that is to say ordered to his estates, where he remained on and off until 1642. For a man of his temperament and background such enforced inactivity was galling. France was at this time dotted with active and rather embittered young noblemen sulking in their castles.

Richelieu died in 1642 and Louis XIII a year later. Louis XIV being an infant, France was ruled by the Queen Mother and Mazarin. In view of his past loyalty to the Queen, La Rochefoucauld was entitled to expect that high office would now come his way. Indeed it was promised to him, not once, but frequently. The promises were not kept. He was fobbed off with words of affectionate esteem and the prospect of less distinguished appointments. These, too, did not materialize. The posts of *Grand Ecuyer*, of *Général des Galères*, the governorship of Havre-de-Grace, all were dangled before his eyes, only to be snatched away as the results of intrigue in which men whom he had regarded as his friends were not seldom involved. The Queen ordered him to break off his relations with Madame de Chevreuse. Being a gentleman, he refused to obey his monarch in this

matter. Madame de Chevreuse, however, displayed no gratitude for his chivalry, which she now seems to have regarded as an obstacle to the pursuit of her own interests. La Rochefoucauld applied for a military command. He was not given one. Finally, and this seems to have caused him particular irritation, he requested that his wife be accorded the honour of the *tabouret,* a distinction which enabled certain great ladies to remain seated, on occasion, in the Queen's presence. Madame de Marcillac was certainly entitled, by birth, marriage and character, to this petty, but much sought after, honour. It was promised again and again, and time after time La Rochefoucauld had to endure the mortification of seeing his name passed over in favour of the wives of men whom he regarded as his inferiors. As he later pointed out in his *Maxims,* such niggling irritations can be more destructive to a man's peace of mind than great disappointments or even real tragedy. As the years went by in this fruitless search for suitable employment and even normal recognition, La Rochefoucauld came to regard himself as a failure, while the intrigues with which his contemporaries successfully furthered their own interests at court disgusted him. All he could acquire was the governorship of Poitou, and even that he had to pay cash for.

It is hard to imagine a climate more antipathetic to La Rochefoucauld than that which existed at a court presided over by Mazarin. La Rochefoucauld, Madame de Sévigné tells us, was a great novel-

reader. The French novels of the day were flamboyant, chivalresque romances of the type that Cervantes had parodied a generation before, in his *Don Quixote*. Perhaps the most celebrated of these was *Astrée*, and we are assured that La Rochefoucauld could re-read it at least once a year. The last dreams of romantic feudalism consorted ill with a period when money and backstairs influence more often decided the course of history. La Rochefoucauld, in his *Memoirs*, has spoken of the "natural hatred" he felt for Richelieu. Mazarin, speaking his queer jargon of mixed Italian and French, lacked even Richelieu's superb arrogance.

This foreign, avaricious and nepotic cleric was unpopular with a large segment of the nobility and also with the city of Paris on account of the great weight of taxes which were made necessary by the interminable wars. When he had, at last and by brilliant diplomacy, put an end to the Thirty Years War with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, much of the energy hitherto expended on the frontiers was turned against him. The wars of the Fronde, from 1648 to 1653, were the result.

It would be too complicated here to explain the nature or follow the course of the extremely involved events of those five years. The fact that few real issues were being consciously fought for is shown by the speed and frequency with which many of the principal actors changed sides. In brief, the struggle was one for power between the old provincial nobility,

the nascent Parisian *bourgeoisie*, and the central executive. As is well known, the pretensions of Paris were checked, while the French nobility was totally defeated and has never, as such, held real power again. For the men engaged, however, it was largely a question of personal loyalties. La Rochefoucauld was at this time the lover of the beautiful duchesse de Longueville, Condé's sister and a former mistress of Turenne, and thus in some ways and at some times the inspirer of the whole Fronde rebellion. La Rochefoucauld, of course, galloped off at once to win glory in her eyes.

Pour mériter ses vœux, he wrote, quoting a tragedy of the time, *pour plaire à ses beaux yeux, J'ai fait la guerre aux rois, je l'aurais faite aux Dieux.*

After his father's funeral, in 1650, he persuaded his assembled tenants and retainers to follow him in an attack on Saumur which was then held for the court party. He failed to capture it. He was besieged in Bordeaux while the royalist troops pillaged and burned his family seat. Later, in the Battle of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, in 1652, he was seriously wounded in the face and was lucky to retain his eyesight. By now the Fronde was in final disintegration, and since Madame de Longueville had transferred her affections to the duc de Nemours, La Rochefoucauld accepted this opportunity to bid farewell to the lady and to the rebellion alike.

He retired once again to his estates, an impoverished and now very disillusioned man. He

was thirty-nine years old. He was to remain there until 1658, the year that preceded Mazarin's death, writing his memoirs, contemplating the unfortunate and extravagant past, the disloyalty of friends and infidelity of mistresses, and the hollowness of ambition. He was not, however, quite so devoid of ambition as he would make out, since he later applied for the post of tutor to the young Dauphin. In view of his almost total lack of any obvious qualification for this post, other than his high birth, and even more so of his past conduct, it is hardly surprising that his application was turned down.

But Mazarin was too shrewd a statesman to be vindictive, and he left his defeated enemies in peace. Thanks to the loyal help of his former secretary, Jean Hérault de Gourville, who had been born at La Rochefoucauld, had long served the family, and was now one of the leading figures in Mazarin's administration, the duc de la Rochefoucauld was even enabled to repair his ravaged fortune.

His activities as a *Frondeur* were to have one last, unfortunate echo. Like many of his contemporaries, and indeed like numerous retired soldiers in other ages, he employed his leisure in writing his memoirs. It was the custom at that time for people to read aloud from their own works and to copy passages into one another's commonplace books. The facts are not quite clear, but it seems probable that one such commonplace book fell into the hands of the Elzevirs, the Dutch printers, who extracted from it

such portions as dealt with the Fronde and published them, in 1662, as the *Memoirs of La Rochefoucauld.* The book contained passages that were obnoxious to the young king and his advisers, and though La Rochefoucauld strongly denied authorship, everyone knew that he had been engaged upon his memoirs and it was generally believed that these were they. Thus what slender chances remained to him of a return to public life were gone. As it happens, La Rochefoucauld was telling the truth, for less than half the text was from his pen, though this was not finally established until early in the nineteenth century, when his real *Memoirs* were discovered in the family archives. He had been advised by his friend Gourville not to publish, and this advice he had taken.

Back in Paris, in 1659, debarred from politics and somewhat contemptuous of a courtier's existence, he naturally gravitated into one of the salons which had come into existence during the past few years. These salons, devoted to good talk and pleasant sociability, and each presided over by a great lady, had different tones and varied amusements. The one that La Rochefoucauld frequented can have had little in common with the caricature of these institutions presented by Molière in *Les Précieuses Ridicules.* He attended the drawing-rooms of the marquise de Sablé a lady who by this time was over sixty and who, after a youth of gallantry and conspiracy, had turned to religion. She was a Jansenist, a friend of

Pascal's, and in due course withdrew from the world into Port-Royal, where she died. But during the 1660's she had her salon in the lovely place Royale, now the place des Vosges. The company she kept was extremely congenial to the duc de la Rochefoucauld, and her chef was a superlative cook.

Just as each salon had its own tone, so each had its own particular amusement. In Mademoiselle de Scudéry's drawing-room the company wrote madrigals. In that of the Grande Mademoiselle it was the custom of the guests to compose *portraits,* brief sketches of persons known to them all, of one another, and of themselves. This introductory note ends with La Rochefoucauld's self-portrait. In Madame de Sablé's salon, it was the amusement of the company to write maxims. At one meeting a subject, an abstract subject usually, would be discussed. Before they met again, the guests would attempt to express their views on this subject in writing, giving to their ideas as neat and concise a form as possible. These they would then read aloud, and further discussion would follow.

It is important to realize the circumstances in which these *Maxims* were composed, and the purpose for which they were originally written, if one would savour them to the full. They were meant to interest and to entertain, to provide the springboard, as it were, for amusing, pleasant and occasionally profound conversation, and as such there can be little doubt that they were and still are eminently success-

ful. Unlike, say, the pronouncements of a Nietzsche, they were not intended to be the last word on the subject, but the first. La Rochefoucauld expresses himself pointedly, but in the manner of a man addressing his equals, not of a schoolmaster telling his pupils, for his style is never didactic. All the habitués of Madame de Sablé's salon wrote maxims: several of them, including Madame de Sablé herself, published theirs in book form: La Rochefoucauld's were far and away the best, and are the only ones that have survived.

As for the tone of his *Maxims,* the mild pessimism, the gentle cynicism of some, the sceptical attitude towards the appearance of virtue, these, too, were not so much La Rochefoucauld's invention as the atmosphere of disillusionment that prevailed among this group of friends. La Rochefoucauld, indeed, went a little farther than the others and, since he had such a talent for expression, made his meaning more unmistakably clear than could they. But when Madame de Sévigné pretends to find his *Maxims* shocking, she is being humorous. Nobody has ever really found La Rochefoucauld shocking, except perhaps certain segments of nineteenth century society with an apparently endless ability for self-deception and a quite remarkable love of humbug. From the viewpoint of the mid-twentieth century they must seem very mild and moderate, as well as extremely sensible. But it is not the purpose of this introduction to speak for the *Maxims* which follow. The imperti-

nence would rival the folly of any attempt to elucidate what is perhaps the most lucid collection of thoughts ever committed to paper. It is enough to say that the world which La Rochefoucauld had seen was not a pretty world. In France, as in England, men had observed every form of betrayal enacted, and often successfully, by princes, noblemen and commoners. Brutality and guile had triumphed with horrible regularity over loyalty and love. This was the age of Hobbes' *Leviathan:* Milton was making of Satan the greatest hero of English epic verse: in France, thoughtful men inclined either to the pessimism of the Jansenists or, perhaps less courageously, to that mechanical view of mankind and of the world which is foreshadowed in Descartes. La Rochefoucauld does not seem to have fully accepted either attitude and to have sympathized with both. After what we have lived through, it is not hard for us to understand this point of view.

The publication of the *Maxims,* in 1665, corresponded with the beginning of La Rochefoucauld's liaison with Madame de Lafayette, which was to last in sunny, autumnal happiness until his death. Henceforth it was her salon, in the rue de Vaugirard, that he frequented. He encouraged her to write and helped her—we do not know to what extent—in the composition of her novels. He felt, perhaps correctly, that she was the only genuine woman he had encountered in an age of artificiality and faithlessness. Her affection for him was of a warmth that can still

be felt across the centuries. It has, indeed, frequently been said that her influence on him was a mellowing one. It may be so. In general the revisions to the *Maxims,* as edition after edition appeared, were in the direction of less bitterness, of a decreasing harshness in judgment, of, one might almost say, a greater trust in men. And this slight change in attitude has been frequently, perhaps usually, ascribed to Madame de Lafayette. She is quoted as remarking of her celebrated lover: "He gave me his wit, but I reformed his heart." Whether she ever said such a thing or not, it was during this period that he wrote almost all his most stinging maxims concerning women. His relations with Madame de Lafayette were probably platonic during the greater part, if not all, of their friendship. Safe in her afternoon affection, he could and did contemplate the more turbulent emotions of his youth.

Though tortured by gout, his last years were his happiest. This was, for him, a period of comparative well-being. He had a multitude of friends, which is hardly to be wondered at, since he would seem to have been perhaps the most charming and sensitive man of his age. The rebuilding of Verteuil was completed in 1676. He was profoundly admired as a writer, and we know from his letters how great was the importance that, secretly at least, he attached to literary success. If only a substitute, it was still quite an acceptable one for the glory that he would have preferred to win in the world of action. (And if

there was a mellowing, this recognition may have contributed more to it than the kindness of Madame de Lafayette.) His son had achieved a great position at court, and towards the end of his life La Rochefoucauld handed over to him his titles and estates. His grandson married the daughter of Louvois and was thus assured of a great future. Had it not been for his declining health and the inevitable sadness of growing old, the autumn of his life might well have been golden.

In 1672, however, he had again been the victim of fate. His eldest son, the prince de Marcillac, was seriously wounded during the Rhine crossing. His fourth son, the chevalier, was killed in this engagement, as was his illegitimate son, the duc de Longueville, a young man for whom La Rochefoucauld felt a particularly strong affection. "He has been weeping," Madame de Sévigné wrote, "from the bottom of his heart."

He lived for a further eight years, occasionally visiting Versailles, where he was regarded as a curious relic from another age, racked by his gout, polishing and adding to his maxims until they reached the form from which they are here translated. And on March 16th, 1680, at the age of sixty-six, he died, after receiving the last rites of the Church from his friend Bossuet.

To conclude, here is François de la Rochefoucauld's estimate of himself, a self-portrait which formed one of the collection published in 1659 by Mademoiselle

de Montpensier, the Grande Mademoiselle. This is how he saw himself when he was beginning or just about to begin, the writing of his *Maxims*.

I am of medium build, broad and well-proportioned. My complexion is dark, but fairly uniform; my forehead is high and reasonably wide, my eyes are black, small, deep-set, with brows that though black and thick are well-formed. I find it hard to give a proper description of my nose, for it is neither flat, nor aquiline, nor thick, nor pointed—or so at least it seems to me. All I can say is that it is on the large rather than the small side, and that it is perhaps a trifle too long. I have a big mouth and my lips, which are usually rather red, are neither well nor ill shaped. My teeth are white and passably regular. In the old days I used to be told that I had too much chin: I have just felt it, and also looked in the glass to see if this is so, and I really cannot say whether it is true or not. As for the shape of my face, it is either squarish or oval: I should find it hard to be sure which. My hair is black, curls naturally, and is sufficiently long and thick for me to be able to claim a fine head of hair. My expression has something of gloom and also of pride to it: this has led most people to assume that I am contemptuous of them, though no assumption could be further from the truth. I move with ease and perhaps slightly too much, to the extent that I gesticulate a great deal when talking. That is my frank opinion of my appearance, and

it will be found, I think, that this description is not far removed from the truth. I shall be equally honest in the remaining part of this self-portrait; for I have studied myself enough to know myself well, and I have both sufficient self-assurance to be able to speak openly of those good qualities I may possess and enough sincerity to admit to my defects.

In the first place, my prevailing humour may be described as melancholic, to the extent that in these last three or four years I have hardly been known to laugh more than three or four times. Nevertheless it seems to me that my melancholia would be sufficiently bearable and gentle were it derived solely from my temperament: but I have been afflicted with so many extraneous causes for sadness, which have so filled my imagination and preoccupied my mind, that I usually sit in silence, lost in thought, or when I do speak it is in an abstracted fashion. I am extremely reserved with strangers, and I am not even very open with most of the people whom I know. This is a defect, as I am well aware, and I shall spare no pains to rid myself of it: but since my somewhat gloomy expression tends to make me appear even more reserved than I actually am, and since it is not within our power to alter a disagreeable appearance which is due to nature's arrangement of our features, I fear that though I may correct the internal causes of the impression I make, the displeasing external marks of this failing will remain with me, do what I may.

I am witty, and I do not blush to say so; why put up any pretence in the matter? Endless shilly-shallyings and apologetics before stating one's advantages seem to me to smack of vanity hidden beneath a show of modesty: it is a very skilful means of persuading others to think even more highly of oneself than one allegedly wishes them to do. For myself I have no desire that I should be thought finer than I say I am, nor better tempered than I paint myself as being, nor wittier and cleverer than my own description of myself. So, once again, I have wit, but it is tainted with melancholy: for though I can express myself well, have a useful memory and can think without confusion, I am nevertheless so preoccupied with my own chagrins that I often, in fact, put my meaning across rather badly.

One of the pleasures I value most highly is well-bred conversation; I like it to be serious, and to deal largely with moral questions. Nevertheless I am quite able to appreciate flippancy as well; and if I do not often myself make remarks intended to raise a laugh, it is not at all that I do not enjoy a well-turned witticism, and I find those amusing interchanges, at which certain relaxed and quick minds are so adept, highly entertaining.

I write well in prose, and also in verse; and if I were to attach more importance to the glory that comes from such accomplishments I believe that I could, with a little effort, achieve quite a considerable reputation as a writer. I like reading, my favour-

ite books being those which help to form the mind and fortify the soul. Above all, I derive an extreme satisfaction from reading aloud, with a clever companion; for when so doing one will be constantly reflecting upon the written word; and the reflexions thus made constitute the most agreeable sort of conversation in the world, and the most useful.

When my opinion is asked I am a fairly good judge of works in verse or in prose; but I am inclined to express my views on them somewhat too freely. Another mistake I make is my tendency to be over-fastidious and too harsh in my criticism. It does not distress me when others argue, and I will even on occasion join in quite voluntarily; but I usually advance my own opinions with undue heat; and when the wrong cause is being upheld against me, I will sometimes become so passionate an advocate of reason as to grow wellnigh unreasonable myself.

My sentiments are virtuous, my intentions good, and so great is my desire to be a perfect gentleman and honourable man-of-the-world that my friends can cause me no greater pleasure than by frankly pointing out to me when I am at fault. Those persons who know me fairly well, and who have been good enough on occasion to advise me in this fashion, will admit that I have always listened to them with the utmost gratification and with all the humility of mind that can be desired.

All my passions are rather gentle and well under my control: I have hardly ever been observed in a

temper, and I have never hated anyone. This does not mean that I am incapable of exacting vengeance, particularly if I have been offended in a matter that touches my honour and which I therefore cannot ignore. On the contrary, I am sure that my sense of duty towards myself will, at such times, so well replace the emotion of hatred that in my search for vengeance I will display even greater energy than other men.

I am not troubled by ambition. There are few things which frighten me, death least of any. I am scarcely susceptible to pity, and would wish not to feel it at all. On the other hand there are no lengths to which I will not go in order to alleviate the afflictions of others; and I really believe that in such cases one should do everything, even to the extent of showing a great deal of compassion for them in their misfortunes; but I also believe that one should be satisfied with the display and avoid, most carefully, the true feeling. For pity is an emotion which is quite useless in a well-formed soul; it serves only to enfeeble the heart; and it should be left to the common people who, since they never behave according to the dictates of reason, must be stirred by emotion.

I am fond of my friends, so fond of them that I should not hesitate for a moment if it were a question of sacrificing my interests for theirs; I am tolerant, will patiently endure their bad moods, and will readily make excuses for them. But I am not par-

ticularly demonstrative as a friend, nor am I much put out if I do not see them for considerable periods of time.

I am by nature poorly endowed with curiosity concerning most of those matters which others find of such absorbing interest. I am very discreet and have less difficulty than most in keeping a secret that has been entrusted to me. I am extremely reliable: I never break my word, no matter what the results of keeping it may be, and that is a rule of conduct to which I have adhered with the utmost rigour throughout my whole life.

With women I am meticulously polite, and I do not believe that I have ever behaved, in the presence of a woman, in such a way as to cause her distress. When they have good minds, I prefer their conversation to that of men; their talk has a sort of gentleness which is never to be met with in ours, and, apart from that, it seems to me that they can express themselves more neatly and can give a pleasanter turn to what they say.

As for love, in the past I have gone in for it a little; at present I do so no longer, although I am still young. I have given up flirting, and it is a source of astonishment to me that so many honest people should still indulge in it.

I have the greatest respect for fine passions, which are the mark of great souls; and although the disquiet they engender is in some ways antagonistic to strict wisdom, they are so easily linked to the most

austere virtues that I do not believe they can be justly condemned. Knowing well all the delicacy and strength of great passion, I do believe that should I myself ever fall in love, it will be in this manner; but being made the way I am, I very much doubt whether this knowledge of mine will ever be transferred from the head to the heart.

THE MAXIMS

Our virtues are mostly but vices in disguise

1

What we take to be virtues are frequently but the concatenation of various actions and divers interests arranged in a certain pattern by luck or by our own skill; it is not always valour which makes men valiant, nor chastity that renders women chaste.

2

Self-love is the greatest flatterer of all.

3

Though the realm of self-love has been explored, its uncharted territories remain vast.

4.

Self-love can still outwit the shrewdest of men.

5

We can no more set a term to our passions than to our life.

6

Passion, which often makes fools of the cleverest men, can frequently bestow wit upon fools.

7

Statesmen will often present those great and striking deeds with which they dazzle our eyes as the outcome of some grand design, whereas in fact they are usually the product of mood and of emotion. Thus the struggle between Augustus and Mark Anthony, portrayed as the result of their conflicting ambition each to become sole master of the world, was perhaps caused simply by mutual jealousy.

8

Our passions are the only orators who always convince: being, as it were, nature's artistry, they obey infallible laws, and the simplest man, enthused by passion, is more persuasive than the most eloquent without it.

9

Our passions lack justice and are motivated by self-interest, so that it is dangerous to be led by them; they should not be trusted, even when they appear most reasonable.

10

The human heart is a perpetual generator of passions. Thus the overthrow of one almost always implies its succession by another.

11

Our passions frequently give birth to their antitheses. Miserliness can sometimes result in extravagance, prodigality in avarice; man often holds fast through weakness, and is emboldened by timidity.

12

Careful as we may be to screen our passions with the appearance of piety or of honour, they will yet always be discernible through such veils.

13

Our conceit makes us resent the condemnation of our taste more sharply than the dismissal of our views.

14

Men not only forget benefits received and injuries endured; they even come to dislike those

to whom they are indebted, while ceasing to hate those others who have done them harm. Diligence in returning good for good, and in exacting vengeance for evil, comes to be a sort of servitude which we do not readily accept.

15

The clemency of princes is often but an act of policy to win the affection of their subjects.

16

Such clemency, which is presented as a virtue, is inspired sometimes by vanity, occasionally by laziness, frequently by fear, and almost always by a combination of the three.

17

The moderation of happy persons is a product of that calm with which good fortune invests the temperament.

18

Modesty in good fortune is inspired by fear lest we attract the envy and contempt rightly meted out to those who are intoxicated by success: it is

a vain and ostentatious display of our spiritual strength: finally, the modesty of men at the zenith betrays their desire to appear superior to their destiny.

19

We are all strong enough to endure the misfortunes of others.

20

The steadiness of the wise man is only the art of keeping his agitations locked within his breast.

21

A condemned man will sometimes affect a steadfastness and a scorn of death which are, in fact, only the fear of staring mortality in the face; one might say that such steadfastness and scorn are to the spirit what the blindfold is to the eyes.

22

Philosophy can easily triumph over past misfortunes and over those that lie ahead: but the misfortunes of the present will triumph over our philosophy.

23

Few men realize the fact of death; we do not usually tolerate its existence through resolution, but rather through insensitivity and habit; and most men die because they cannot help it.

24

When at last great men let themselves be overwhelmed by adversity, they reveal that it was the strength of their ambition, and not of their soul, which had hitherto enabled them to support its buffetings. This shows that, high vanity apart, heroes are as other men.

25

Firmer virtues are required to support good fortune than bad.

26

No man may gaze fixedly at the sun, nor at death.

27

A man will often boast of his passions, wicked though they be; envy, however, is a timid and a shameful emotion to which no man ever dare admit.

28

Jealousy is, in its way, both fair and reasonable, since its intention is to preserve for ourselves something which is ours, or which we believe to be ours; envy, on the other hand, is a frenzy which cannot endure contemplating the possessions of others.

29

We inspire less hatred by our evil deeds than by our good qualities; it is these, not those, that enrage our persecutors.

30

Our strength exceeds our will; and it is often to justify ourselves that we believe certain undertakings impossible.

31

Were we faultless, we would not derive such satisfaction from remarking the faults of others.

32

Jealousy feeds on doubt; it changes to rage, or it dies, as soon as doubt becomes certainty.

33

Pride will ever make good its losses: it is none the poorer, even when it renounces vanity.

34

Were we totally without pride, we should not resent it in others.

35

All men possess an equal share of pride; they vary only in their means and methods of displaying it.

36

It would seem that nature, which has so wisely arranged our bodily organs to ensure our happiness, has also endowed us with pride that we may be spared the chagrin of recognizing our own imperfections.

37

Pride, rather than virtue, makes us reprove those who have done wrong; our reproaches are not so much intended to improve the evil-doer, as

to show him that we are quite free of his taint.

38

Our promises are made in hope, and kept in fear.

39

Self-interest speaks many tongues and plays many parts, including that of the disinterested man.

40

Self-interest, blinding to some, is a guiding light to others.

41

Men too involved in details usually become unable to deal with great matters.

42

We are not strong enough to follow the dictates of our reason all the way.

❧ 43 ❧

Man often believes that he is the leader when he is being led; and while his mind is striving towards one end, his heart is imperceptibly drawing him towards another.

❧ 44 ❧

Intellectual strength and intellectual weakness are ill-named; they are, in fact, only the manifestation of good or poor functioning on the part of our physical organs.

❧ 45 ❧

The whims of mood are even weirder than those of fate.

❧ 46 ❧

Philosophers have sometimes expressed attachment, sometimes indifference, to life. This is a matter of taste, deriving from self-esteem. As such it is no more a fit subject for discussion than is a partiality for certain foods or a preference for particular colours.

❧ 47 ❧

Our temperament sets the value on all that fortune bestows upon us.

48

Satisfaction derives from the tasting, not from the dish tasted; happiness comes of having what we like, not in owning what others find desirable.

49

We are never quite as happy, or as unhappy, as we think.

50

A man convinced of his own merit will accept misfortune as an honour, for thus can he persuade others, as well as himself, that he is a worthy target for the arrows of fate.

51

The gravest blow to our self-satisfaction should be the realization that what we like to-day we frequently disliked yesterday.

52

No matter how great the disparity between men's destinies may appear, there is nevertheless a certain balance of good and bad which serves as an equalizer.

53

Despite all the advantages that nature may bestow upon a man, he still needs luck if he is to be a hero.

54

Philosophers have expressed their contempt for material riches; they thus reveal their wish to vindicate their merit on their fate by displaying their contempt for those gifts which fate has withheld from them; it is a secret remedy to save them from those degradations which poverty entails; it is also an indirect method for obtaining that respect which they cannot gain through wealth.

55

The hatred of favourites is neither more nor less than the love of favour. Our resentment that favour be denied to us is softened and sweetened by the contempt we express for those who have it; and we refuse them our respect since we cannot strip them of that which makes them respected by all the world.

56

To achieve a position in the world a man will do his utmost to appear already arrived.

❧ 57 ❧

Men are proud of their great deeds, though these are more frequently the result of chance than of a grand design.

❧ 58 ❧

It would seem that our actions, too, have their good or bad horoscope which largely decides the measure of praise or of censure that they will receive.

❧ 59 ❧

There is no accident so disastrous that a clever man cannot derive some profit from it: nor any so fortunate that a fool cannot turn it to his disadvantage.

❧ 60 ❧

Fortune twists everything to the advantage of her favourites.

❧ 61 ❧

A man's happiness or unhappiness depends as much upon his temperament as upon his destiny.

62

Sincerity comes from an open heart. It is exceedingly rare; what usually passes for sincerity is only an artful pretence designed to win the confidence of others.

63

Our aversion to telling lies often derives from an imperceptible ambition that our words be rated high, that what we say be treated with religious respect.

64

If truth be beneficial, its semblance is even more mischievous.

65

Foresight has been extolled in the highest terms. Yet no matter how prudent our foresight may be, it is no safeguard against even the smallest eventualities; for it acts only through man, than which nothing is more changeable.

66

A clever man will know how to range his in-

terests, and will pursue each according to its merits. Our greed, however, will often confuse our method; for we run after so many things at once that we frequently miss what is of importance in pursuit of what is negligible.

67

Grace is to the body what sense is to the mind.

68

It is hard to define love. One might say that it is, spiritually, a passion for domination: that intellectually it is concord and affinity: that physically it is only a secret and subtle desire to possess, after many mysteries, that which we love.

69

If pure love, unalloyed by our other emotions, exists, it is to be found deep in our hearts where we ourselves are unaware of its existence.

70

Where there is love, no disguise can conceal it

for long; similarly no pretence can long impersonate a love that does not exist.

71

When two people have ceased to love, the memory that remains is almost always one of shame.

72

Love, to judge by most of its effects, is closer to hatred than to friendship.

73

It is possible to find women who have never had a love-affair; but a woman who has had only one is indeed a rarity.

74

Love is unique, but has a thousand different counterfeits.

75

Love, like fire, needs constant motion; when it ceases to hope, or to fear, love dies.

76

True love is like psychic experience. Everybody tells ghost stories but few of us have ever seen a ghost.

77

The word love is applied to an infinity of transactions with which it has as little connection as has the Doge with the business activities of the Venetians.

78

For most men the love of justice is only the fear of suffering injustice.

79

For a man who lacks self-confidence, silence is the wisest course.

80

What makes us so inconstant in friendship is the difficulty of appreciating another man's soul and the ease of judging his wit.

81

We can only love in relationship to ourselves, and do but follow our tastes and our pleasure

when we come to prize our friends above ourselves; yet such preference is the only way to true and perfect friendship.

82

We seek to be reconciled with our enemies only because we hope to draw some advantage therefrom, because we are weary of the struggle, or because we fear lest some misfortune to ourselves be impending.

83

What men have called friendship is only a social arrangement, a mutual adjustment of interests, an interchange of services given and received; it is, in sum, simply a business from which those involved propose to derive a steady profit for their own self-love.

84

It is more shameful to distrust one's friends than to be deceived by them.

85

We often persuade ourselves that we are fond of people more powerful than ourselves, yet it is only self-interest that inspires such affection. We do not

cleave to the mighty for the good that we would do them, but rather for the benefits that we would receive.

86

Our distrust justifies our deception by others.

87

Men would not live long in society were they not one another's dupes.

88

Self-interest augments or decreases the merit that we detect in our friends, according to the amount of pleasure that we derive from their company; and the yardstick by which we judge them is their relationship with ourselves.

89

Everyone complains of his memory, none of his judgment.

90

In daily life our faults are frequently more pleasant than our good qualities.

91

The most towering ambition is quite invisible if met with in circumstances which make its achievement an absolute impossibility.

92

To disillusion a man infatuated with his own merit is to do him as evil a turn as that which was once played upon the Athenian lunatic who believed that every ship entering the harbour was his.

93

Old people love to give good advice: it compensates them for their inability nowadays to set a bad example.

94

A great name debases, instead of ennobling, those who know not how to carry it.

95

It is proof that a man's merit is exceptional when those who envy him the most yet feel constrained to praise him.

96

There are occasions when the responsibility for ingratitude may lie more with the benefactor than with the recipient.

97

It has been maintained that wit and judgment are quite independent of one another. This is incorrect. Judgment is only the more splendid result of the beam of light cast by the mind; this beam reaches into the depths; it observes all that should be observed and perceives the apparently imperceptible. Thus it must be agreed that the extent and intensity of the light cast by the mind produces all those effects which are attributed to the exercise of judgment.

98

Whereas every man will speak well of his own heart, none dares do so of his own wits.

99

Honest and delicate thought produce a polished mind.

100

Gallantry of mind lies in the ability to make flattery agreeable.

101

It often happens that ideas reach our mind in a state of perfection exceeding that which our intellect, with all the resources of art, could fashion.

102

The heart will always delude the head.

103

Those who know their own minds do not always know their own hearts.

104

Men, and their affairs, all have their proper point of perspective. Some can only be truly judged from nearby, while fully to appreciate others distance is essential.

105

The rational man is not he who stumbles upon reason, but he who knows what it is, discerns it, and relishes it.

106

For true understanding, comprehension of detail is imperative. Since such detail is wellnigh in-

finite, our knowledge is always superficial and imperfect.

107

To pose as totally unaffected is, in itself, a form of affectation.

108

The mind cannot masquerade as the heart for any length of time.

109

In youth, hot blood makes for changing tastes: in old age, habit and usage produce the contrary effect.

110

There is nothing we give more lavishly than our advice.

111

The more a man loves his mistress the closer he is to hating her.

112

The bad features of a man's mind, like those of his face, become more marked with age.

❧ *113* ❧

A happy marriage is a possibility: a delicious marriage is not.

❧ *114* ❧

We cannot bear to be deceived by our enemies or betrayed by our friends, yet we are often quite happy to deceive or betray ourselves.

❧ *115* ❧

It is as easy to deceive oneself without noticing it as it is difficult to deceive others without their realizing the deception.

❧ *116* ❧

Nothing is less sincere than our manner of asking for, and giving, advice. He who asks it feigns a respectful deference for his friend's opinion, whereas in fact all that interests him is that his friend should approve his views and, as it were, go bail for his chosen mode of conduct; while he who gives pretends to repay the other's trust with a warm and disinterested zeal on his friend's behalf, whereas in fact the advice that he gives is usually directed solely to securing his own interests or increasing his esteem.

117

The most subtle of all forms of cunning is to know when we should pretend to fall into the traps that have been laid for us; a man is never more easily deceived than when he believes he is deceiving others.

118

The determination never to deceive lays us open to repeated deception.

119

We are so accustomed to adopting a mask before others that we end by being unable to recognize ourselves.

120

Treason is more often the result of weakness than of a deliberate plan to betray.

121

Man often does good that he may do evil with impunity.

122

If we master our passions it is due to their weakness, not our strength.

123

There would be few pleasures if there were no self-delusion.

124

Very clever men affect, throughout their lives, a contempt for subterfuge; thus can they draw on an untapped reserve when a great occasion or a paramount interest requires that they be sly.

125

Habitual subterfuge is the mark of a small mind; and it almost always happens that the man who uses cunning to close one gap in his defences will uncover another by so doing.

126

Cunning and treachery come solely from a lack of skill.

127

The surest method of being deceived is to believe that one is cleverer than others.

128

Excessive subtlety is false delicacy; true delicacy is well-founded subtlety.

129

Clumsiness is sometimes sufficient defence against deception by a clever man.

130

Weakness is the only incorrigible failing.

131

When a woman abandons herself for love, love-making is the least of her faults.

132

To know how others should behave is easier than to know how one should behave oneself.

133

The only good copies are those which point the absurdity of bad originals.

134

We are never so ridiculous through what we are as through what we pretend to be.

135

At times a man is as different from himself as he is from others.

136

There are people who would never have fallen in love, had they not heard love talked about.

137

We speak little when vanity is not the prompter.

138

We would rather speak ill of ourselves than not at all.

139

One of the reasons why there are so few reasonable and pleasant conversationalists is that almost everyone concentrates on what he wishes to say, rather than attempting to give accurate and clear replies to what is said to him. Even the cleverest and best-mannered persons are content to adopt an attentive expression, while their eyes and manner betray that they are not listening at all, that they are only awaiting the chance to produce their own cherished views; they do not seem to realize

that so great an anxiety to please oneself is a poor method of pleasing or convincing others, nor that the perfect conversationalist is he who perfectly understands the art of listening and answering.

140

A clever man would often be thoroughly at a loss were there no fools to keep him company.

141

We often boast that we are never bored; our pride is such that it will not allow us to find our own company tedious.

142

As great minds can express much in few words, so small minds have the contrary talent of talking a great deal without saying anything at all.

143

When we exaggerate the good qualities of others, we are expressing our esteem for our own fine feelings rather than for their virtues; and we would be praised ourselves when we seem to praise others.

144

We do not like to give praise, and we never do so without reasons of self-interest. Praise is a cunning, concealed and delicate form of flattery which, in different ways, gratifies both the giver and receiver; the one accepts it as the reward for merit; the other bestows it to display his sense of justice and his powers of discernment.

145

Our praise is often venomous, designed to expose back-handedly, in those of whom it is spoken, those very failings upon which we dare not comment in any other fashion.

146

We usually only praise that we may be praised.

147

Few men are wise enough to prefer useful criticism to treacherous praise.

148

Hard words can be praise, and praises can be slander.

149

The refusal to accept praise is the desire to be praised twice over.

150

The wish to deserve the praise we receive strengthens our virtues; and praise bestowed upon wit, courage and beauty contributes to their increase.

151

It is harder to avoid being led than to lead others.

152

If we never flattered ourselves, we would be immune to the flattery of others.

153

Nature creates merit: chance allows it to operate.

154

Chance cures us of many faults incorrigible to reason.

155

There are men of merit who disgust us, and men whose weaknesses please.

156

There are people whose sole talent is to say and do stupid things with happy results: for them, a change of style would be quite ruinous.

157

A great man's fame must always be measured against the means used to acquire it.

158

Flattery is a counterfeit coinage to which our vanity alone gives currency.

159

Great talents are not enough: they must be used with economy.

160

Splendid though an action may be, it should not be regarded as great unless it be the effect of a great design.

161

A due proportion should exist between the act and the intention, if both are to produce their maximum effect.

162

There is an art in so presenting mediocrity that it will gain favourable esteem. This art will frequently acquire for its possessor a reputation greater than that which is won by true merit.

163

Countless modes of behaviour appear ridiculous, though their hidden motives are both very wise and very sound.

164

It is easier to appear worthy of the office one does not hold than of that which one does.

165

Gentlemen will respect us for our merit: the public, for our luck.

166

The world bestows its prizes more often upon the semblance of merit than upon merit itself.

167

Avarice, more than open-handedness, is the opposite of economy.

168

Hope, deceitful jade though she be, at least leads us to life's end by pleasant paths.

169

When laziness or cowardice keeps us to the path of duty, the credit is often given entirely to our honour.

170

When a man's behaviour is straightforward, sincere and honest it is hard to be sure whether this is due to rectitude or cleverness.

171

Our virtues are drowned in self-interest, as the rivers flow into the sea.

172

Careful examination of the results of boredom reveals that it is responsible for more derelictions of duty than is self-interest.

173

Curiosity takes numerous forms: one, inspired by self-interest, makes us wish to learn that which

can be of use to us: another, the child of pride, is born of the desire to be better informed than our fellows.

174

Our wits are better employed in helping us endure present misfortunes than in anticipating those that may yet be to come.

175

Constancy in love is a perpetual inconstancy, by which our affections are ever directed anew to different aspects of the beloved, preferring now this one, now that: such fidelity is thus only infidelity fixed and enclosed within a single object.

176

In love there are two sorts of constancy: the one comes from the perpetual discovery of new delights in the beloved: the other, from the self-esteem which we derive from our own fidelity.

177

Perseverance deserves neither blame nor praise, for it is but the continuance of tastes and feelings which we can neither slough off nor put on of our own free will.

178

The reason we like our new acquaintances is not so much that we are tired of our old ones, nor is it simply a love of change, but rather the distaste that we feel at being insufficiently admired by those who know us too well, and the hope for an increased measure of respect from those to whom we are less familiar.

179

We sometimes complain mildly of our friends: thus do we justify, in advance, our own fickleness.

180

Our repentance is less a regret for the evil we have done than a precaution against the evil that may be done to us.

181

There is an inconstancy which comes of fickleness of mind, or from the mind's weakness which renders it susceptible to all the ideas of others; there is another, and more pardonable, variety which derives from a disgust with the world.

182

Our virtues contain an element of vice, as medi-

caments are in part compounded of poisons. Prudence selects and tempers these ingredients, and knows how they should be prescribed against the ills of existence.

183

It cannot be denied—and this does great honour to virtue—that man's deepest misfortunes are caused by his crimes.

184

We acknowledge our failings; by such patent sincerity we hope to rectify the harm that those failings do us in the eyes of others.

185

Evil, like good, has its heroes.

186

Not all who have vices are contemptible: all without a trace of virtue are.

187

The invocation of virtue is as useful a weapon in the armoury of self-interest as is vice.

188

The appearance of health is as deceptive in the soul as in the body: though a man appear immune to passion, he is always in danger of being carried away by it, just as a man in perfect health can at any moment be struck down by sickness.

189

It would seem that at each man's birth nature sets a limit both to his virtues and to his vices.

190

Only great men are marked with great faults.

191

One might say that our vices await us along the road of life, like a succession of landlords in whose hostelries we must lodge; even were we allowed to make this journey twice, I doubt if experience would enable us to pass them by.

192

When our vices depart from us, we flatter ourselves that it is we who have rid ourselves of them.

193

In spiritual, as in physical, maladies, the patient is subject to relapse. What we take to be a cure is most often only a temporary abatement of the symptoms or even a change of sickness.

194

Blemishes in the soul are like wounds on the body: no matter how skilfully they be healed, the scar will yet remain: and such a scar is liable to reopen at any moment.

195

The multiplicity of our vices often prevents us from abandoning ourselves entirely to one.

196

Our faults are easily forgotten when they are known only to ourselves.

197

There are men of whom we cannot believe evil until we have actually seen it: but there is none who should cause us surprise by its revelation.

198

We will expatiate on one man's glory to deprecate that of another: and sometimes Monsieur le Prince and Monsieur de Turenne would receive less praise were the intention not to criticize them both.

199

The desire to appear clever often prevents a man from being so.

200

Virtue would not go so far did vanity not keep her company.

201

A man who believes that his inner resources are such that he can dispense with his fellow-men is committing a serious mistake: it is not, however, so serious as that of the man who believes himself indispensable to others.

202

False virtue consists in hiding one's defects from others and from oneself. The truly virtuous man is he who knows his own defects thoroughly and will admit to them.

203

A true gentleman is without pretension.

204

Unapproachability, like rouge, is an embellishment with which a woman emphasizes her beauty.

205

Virtue, in women, is often love of reputation and fondness for tranquillity.

206

The sure sign of an honest gentleman is the wish that his life be at all times lived in openness with others of his sort.

207

Folly is our constant companion throughout life. When a man appears wise, it is only that his follies are suited to his age and station.

208

There are stupid people who, being aware of this, use their stupidity most cleverly.

209

A man who never commits a folly is not as wise as he thinks.

210

Age makes us both more foolish and more wise.

211

There are people who resemble popular songs: they are sung for a time and then forgotten.

212

Most people judge men according to the fashion or the fortune they enjoy.

213

Love of fame, fear of disgrace, ambition, the wish to lead a spacious and comfortable life, the envious desire to humiliate others—such are frequently the causes of that valour so highly prized among men.

214

For ordinary soldiers courage is the perilous trade they follow to earn their daily bread.

215

Perfect bravery and total cowardice are two extremes only rarely to be met. Between them lies a vast territory where will be found every variation and degree of courage. These are as diverse as are men's faces or their feelings. There are soldiers who will readily risk their lives early in the engagement, but who will lose heart later in the day. There are others who are satisfied when they have upheld their honour in the eyes of the world, and who will scarcely advance beyond this. Some are not uniformly masters of their fears: some are susceptible to the contagion of panic: others advance to the attack because they dare not stay behind. There are men who, becoming gradually accustomed to smaller perils, are reinforced in their courage and enabled to confront greater ones. Some are brave with a sword, but frightened by musket fire; others can face bullets but fear steel. All these various forms of courage have this in common: that whereas darkness increases fear, it also hides both good and bad deeds, so that a soldier has greater opportunities for caution by night. There is another aspect of self-protection which is of more general application: no man is ever as totally brave as he would be, were he quite certain of surviving the day. The fear of death, in fact, diminishes valour.

216

Perfect valour is to behave, without witnesses, as one would act were all the world watching.

217

Courage is an extraordinary force exerted by the soul. It enables the soul to rise above the distress, the disorder and the emotions which the prospect of great danger would otherwise excite within it: it is this force which allows heroes to remain calm and to think clearly and freely in the most unexpected and terrible circumstances.

218

Hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue.

219

Most men will run enough risks in action to save their honour: but few will always run enough risks to ensure the success of the purpose for which those risks are run.

220

Vanity, shame, and above all temperament, these are often the explanation of courage in men and virtue in women.

221

We wish to avoid death, but also to win glory. That is why a brave soldier will show more skill and wit in preserving his life than will a sharp man of affairs in safeguarding his property.

222

With the first touch of old age almost everyone reveals how his body and mind will decay.

223

Gratitude, like honest dealing, is good for trade: and we often pay our debts, not because we should, but because by doing so we make it easier to negotiate loans in the future.

224

Not all those who fulfil the obligations of gratitude can thereby flatter themselves that they are grateful.

225

The inadequate thanks that a benefactor feels he has received for the good he has done another comes from the fact that the pride of him who gives and the pride of him who receives cannot agree as to the value of the service rendered.

226

Excessive haste in discharging an obligation is in itself a form of ingratitude.

227

Lucky people scarcely ever correct their faults; they always believe that they have acted rightly if fortune has smiled on their evil ways.

228

Pride hates to owe, and self-interest to pay.

229

The good we have received from a man should make us accept the evil he does us.

230

Nothing is as contagious as example, and we never perform an outstandingly good or evil action without its producing others of its sort. We copy goodness in the spirit of emulation, and wickedness owing to the malignity of our nature which shame holds in check until example sets it free.

231

The wish to be the only wise one is monumental folly.

232

Whatever causes we may ascribe to our afflictions, self-interest and vanity are often solely to blame.

233

Misfortune breeds a variety of hypocrisies. One is in evidence when we claim to mourn the loss of a person dear to us, whereas in fact it is for ourselves that we are shedding our tears: we weep because our own well-being, our pleasure, the attention we enjoyed, have all been affected: we regret that the good opinion in which we formerly were held now no longer exists. Thus to the dead are credited the tears that flow but for the living. I describe this as a form of hypocrisy since at such unhappy times it is ourselves whom we deceive. But there is another variety of hypocrisy, which is less innocent, in that it is intended to impress others; this is the unhappiness of certain persons who aspire to the glory of a fine and deathless sorrow. When time, which effaces all things, has at last worn away the grief they truly felt, they stubbornly continue their tears, their groans, their sighs; they adopt a lugubrious personality and will attempt, with every gesture, to show that theirs

is a sorrow that can be extinguished only in the grave. This gloomy and tedious manifestation of vanity is usually to be met with in ambitious women. Since by reason of their sex they may not tread the paths of glory, they would achieve fame by this display of inconsolable grief. There is a third species of tears, which flow from shallow springs, as easily subject to drought as they are liable to gush: there are also tears shed to gain a reputation for sensibility: tears shed to win sympathy: tears shed to draw the tears of others: and finally, tears shed to avoid the shame of having dry eyes.

234

Pride, rather than a lack of perspicacity, is what usually drives us to oppose with such obstinacy opinions that are generally accepted as correct: though theirs may be the better party, the front benches are already filled, and we certainly do not wish to take a back seat.

235

When our friends' misfortunes present us with the opportunity of displaying our affection for them, we are quickly comforted.

236

It would seem that self-love has fallen victim

to goodness of heart, or even ceased to function altogether, when we labour for the advancement of others. However, it is then only taking the surest road towards its own ends: while pretending to give, it is lending with usury: indeed, by such subtle and refined methods it can captivate the world.

237

No man should be praised for his goodness if he lacks the strength to be bad: in such cases goodness is usually only the effect of indolence or impotence of will.

238

It is less dangerous to harm most men than to do them an excess of good.

239

Nothing flatters our pride more than the confidence of the great: we ascribe their trust to our own merit, and forget that in most cases it is only the effect of their vanity and of their inability to keep a secret.

240

Charm divorced from beauty can be described as a symmetry, the rules of which are unknown to us;

it is a hidden proportion between the features, between the features and the complexion, between the features and the person's manner.

241

All women are flirtatious by nature and also by temperament; and if some women do not flirt, it is because they are restrained by fear or by reason.

242

We frequently annoy those people whom we believe we could never annoy.

243

Few undertakings are impossible in themselves; we lack more often the application that will bring success, than the means.

244

Supreme cleverness is the true knowledge of values.

245

A very clever man will know how to hide his cleverness.

246

What appears as nobility of mind is often only ambition disguised, an ambition which despises petty interests and goes straight for the greater ones.

247

Ordinary loyalty is only a machination of self-love, anxious to win trust. It is a means of raising us above our fellows and making us the depositaries of very important secrets.

248

Magnanimity despises all to obtain all.

249

Eloquence resides as much in the tone, expression and manner of the speaker as in his choice of words.

250

True eloquence consists in saying all that need be said and no more.

251

There are persons whose defects become them, while there are others who are ill-favoured by their good qualities.

252

A change of taste is as ordinary as a change of disposition is extraordinary.

253

Self-interest will set all sorts of virtues and vices in motion.

254

Humility is often but the mask of submission, assumed in order to conquer: it is an artifice of pride, which stoops that it may rise the higher: and pride, which adopts a thousand forms, is never so well disguised nor so capable of deception as when it masquerades as humility.

255

Every emotion has its proper tone of voice, gestures and facial expression: we find our fellows pleasant or not according to the relationship, good or bad, agreeable or disagreeable, that exists between their feelings and the way they show them to us.

256

In every walk of life men assume the expression and manner which, they believe, will make them appear as they would wish to be regarded. Thus

one might say that our world consists entirely of face values.

257

Gravity is a physical mystification to conceal spiritual defects.

258

Good taste is a matter of judgment rather than of wit.

259

The pleasure of love is in loving: and there is more joy in the passion one feels than in that which one inspires.

260

Good manners are the desire to be treated with civility oneself and to be considered a man of the world.

261

The usual education given to young persons redoubles their self-esteem.

262

In no other strong emotion does love of self play so powerful a role as in love; and we are always more ready to shatter the peace of mind of those we love than to sacrifice our own.

263

What passes for generosity is usually but the vanity of giving, which we value higher than the gift itself.

264

Pity is often only the sentiment of our own misfortunes felt in the ills of others. It is a clever prescience of the evil times upon which we may fall. We help others in order to ensure their help in similar circumstances; and the kindnesses we do them are, if the truth were told, only acts of charity towards ourselves invested against the future.

265

A small mind is a stubborn mind; it is hard to believe what lies beyond our field of vision.

266

It is a mistake to believe that only the violent passions, such as ambition or love, can dominate their fellows. Indolence, sluggish though she be, is often the queen of them all; she encroaches upon all the intentions and actions of our life; unperceived she crushes and engorges passion and virtue alike.

267

The promptitude with which we will believe evil of others, without an adequate examination of the facts, is an effect of pride working with laziness. We wish to find the guilty men, and cannot be bothered to study the crime.

268

We demand complete impartiality from a judge upon the bench; and yet we allow our own repute to depend on the judgment of men who are all predisposed against us, whether through jealousy, preoccupation with their own affairs, or simple stupidity; and it is solely in order to win from such judges a favourable verdict that we willingly risk our peace of mind, and even our lives, in a variety of trials.

269

There is hardly a man clever enough to recognize the full extent of the evil that he does.

270

Honours gained are pledges of those still to be won.

271

Youth is a continual drunkenness, the very fever of reason.

272

Nothing should be more humiliating to men who have earned high praise than the trouble they will yet take in petty matters to win the world's approval.

273

There are people, approved of in the world, whose only claim to acceptance lies in their vices which keep the wheels of society turning merrily.

274

The charm of novelty is to love as the bloom is to the fruit; it imparts a lustre which is soon rubbed off, never to return.

275

Natural goodness, which vaunts its own great sensibility, is often quite extinguished by the mere breath of self-interest.

276

Absence diminishes small loves and increases great ones, as the wind blows out the candle and blows up the bonfire.

277

Women frequently believe themselves to be in love even when they are not: the pursuit of an intrigue, the stimulus of gallantry, the natural inclination towards the joys of being loved, and the difficulty of refusal, all these combine to tell them that their passions are aroused when in fact it is but their coquetry at play.

278

A man who negotiates on another's behalf frequently makes himself unpopular. This is because most men, when so doing, will neglect the interests of those they represent in the interest of the negotiation itself, which becomes their own by reason of the honour they can acquire from an undertaking successfully accomplished.

279

When we exaggerate the degree of affection in which we are held by our friends, this is often less from a feeling of gratitude than from a desire to draw attention to our merit.

280

The approbation bestowed on those first entering society often derives from a secret envy of those already established there.

281

Pride, the cause of so much envy, often also serves to keep it within bounds.

282

Falseness well dissembled can so closely mimic truth that it would sometimes be an error of judgment not to let ourselves be deceived.

283

There is, on occasion, no less skill in knowing how to benefit from good advice than in giving oneself sound counsel.

284

There are wicked men who would be less dangerous were they quite devoid of goodness.

285

Magnanimity is adequately defined by its name; nevertheless it could also be described as the commonsense of pride, and the noblest way to garner praise.

286

It is impossible ever to love again what one has truly ceased to love.

287

It is not so much fertility of mind which enables us to perceive several possible courses of action in any given situation, as a lack of perspicacity which causes us to hesitate before each course that our imagination suggests to us and prevents from seeing immediately which is the best.

288

There are certain situations, as there are maladies, which the accepted remedies serve only to aggravate at times; a truly clever man will know when it is dangerous to apply them.

289

Feigned simplicity is a delicate deception.

290

There are more defects of temperament than of mind.

291

The fruits have their season; so do the merits of man.

292

One may say of most men's temperaments what

one can say of most buildings: that they have differing aspects, some agreeable, some not.

293

Moderation cannot claim the distinction of combatting and overcoming ambition, for the two never meet. Moderation is lassitude and laziness of soul, ambition its activity and enthusiasm.

294

We always like people who admire us: we do not always like those whom we admire.

295

We are far from knowing all our desires.

296

It is hard to like someone for whom we feel no respect whatsoever: it is equally difficult to like a man whom we respect far more than we do ourselves.

297

The humours of the body follow their own normal, regular course which imperceptibly controls and directs our will: they revolve the one about

the other, each in turn establishing an invisible domination within us: and thus do they play a considerable part, of which we are unaware, in all our actions.

298

Gratitude in most men is only a secret longing for greater benefits to come.

299

Almost everybody delights in repaying small obligations; many people are grateful for moderate acts of kindness; but there is hardly anyone who is thankful for great mercies.

300

There are follies which are as catching as measles.

301

Plenty of people despise money: few are able to give it away.

302

It is usually in insignificant matters alone that we will risk not trusting to appearances.

303

No matter how well we be spoken of, we are taught nothing thereby we did not already know.

304

We often forgive those who bore us, but that others should find us boring is quite unforgiveable.

305

Self-interest, to which are ascribed all our crimes, should frequently be given the credit for our good deeds.

306

So long as a man is still in a position to help others he will rarely encounter ingratitude.

307

Haughtiness is as becoming towards oneself as it is ridiculous towards others.

308

Moderation has been elevated into a virtue in order to curb the ambitions of the great and to console the second-rate for their lack of good fortune and the mediocrity of their talents.

309

There are men destined to be fools; they are not merely foolish of their own free will, but fate itself also impels them into folly.

310

A touch of folly is needed if we are to extricate ourselves successfully from some of the hazards of life.

311

If some men's absurdities have never been revealed, it is that nobody has really looked for them.

312

The reason why a lover and his mistress are never bored in one another's company is that the talk is constantly of themselves.

313

Why is it that our memory, capable of retaining the minutest details of what has befallen us, yet fails to remind us how often we have already recounted them to the same person?

314

The extreme pleasure we derive from talking about ourselves should warn us that for our audience the pleasure will be almost nil.

315

The reason we do not usually reveal all our innermost thoughts to our friends is less for fear of them than of ourselves.

316

Weak people are incapable of sincerity.

317

Ingratitude from those we have helped is no great misfortune: but to be obligated to a cad is quite intolerable.

318

A man may be cured of folly, but a warped mind can never be put straight.

319

A man will not long retain the feelings he should have for his friends and benefactors if he indulges much in the luxury of discussing their defects.

320

To praise princes for the virtues they have not got is a safe way of insulting them.

321

We are nearer to loving those who hate us than those who love us more than we would wish.

322

Only the contemptible fear contempt.

323

Our wisdom is as susceptible to the whims of chance as are our possessions.

324

Jealousy contains more of self-love than of love.

325

When reason lacks the strength to console us in misfortune, weakness will often do it for us.

326

Ridicule is a worse dishonour than dishonour itself.

327

We will admit our minor defects, but only to persuade others that we have no major ones.

328

Envy is more implacable than hatred.

329

Though we believe on occasion that we detest flattery, it is only the flatterer's manner that we find detestable.

330

We will forgive, while love endures.

331

It is harder to be faithful to a mistress who is kind than to one who is cruel.

332

Woman does not know the full extent of her coquetry.

333

For a woman to be completely cold to a man, he must first inspire her with repugnance.

334

Women can control their passions more easily than their coquetry.

335

In love, deceit almost always outstrips suspicion.

336

There is a kind of love which by its excess rules out jealousy.

337

Certain good qualities resemble the senses, in that those who are quite without them can neither perceive nor understand them.

338

When our hatred grows too strong it debases us beneath those we hate.

339

We are only sensible to our good or evil fortune in accordance to the degree of our self-love.

340

Most women's wits are employed in buttressing their folly rather than their reason.

341

The ardours of youth are no more inimical to salvation than are the insipidities of old age.

342

The accent of the province where we were born remains in our thoughts and in our hearts, as in our speech.

343

A great man will make the most of all that befalls him.

344

Most men are like herbs, in that they possess hidden properties which chance will disclose.

345

We are revealed to others in times of crisis, and even more so to ourselves.

346

There can be no sort of order in a woman's head, nor in her heart, if she be not temperamentally at peace.

347

A man of good sense is almost always one who shares our views.

348

When in love, we often doubt that which we most firmly believe.

349

Love's greatest miracle is the cure of coquetry.

350

What really embitters us so against tricksters is their belief that they are cleverer than we.

351

It is extremely hard to end a love-affair once love is dead.

352

People by whom one must not be bored are almost always boring.

353

A gentleman may be driven mad by love, but it should not make him silly.

354

There are certain defects which, when properly set, can glitter more brilliantly than virtue itself.

355

Some men are more missed than lamented, when they die; others are deeply mourned but scarcely missed.

356

Usually the only people we like to praise are those who admire us.

357

Small minds are hurt too easily by trifles; great minds see beyond them and remain unscathed.

358

Humility is the true touchstone of the Christian virtues: without it we retain all our faults, which are simply concealed through pride that would hide them from others, and often from ourselves.

359

Infidelity should extinguish love, and a man who has reason to feel jealous should not be so: only those persons who avoid giving cause for jealousy are worthy of inspiring it.

360

The slightest infidelity towards ourselves strikes us as a more heinous crime than the greatest betrayal of others.

361

Jealousy is always born with love, but it sometimes outlives its twin.

362

When a woman weeps for her dead lover, it is usually less because of the love she bore him than in order to appear worthy of the love of others.

363

The injuries that others do us are often less painful than those that we inflict upon ourselves.

364

It is generally accepted that a man should not

talk too much about his wife; rare is the man who realizes that he should speak even less about himself.

365

There are good qualities which degenerate into defects if they are not spontaneous, while others are not perfect unless they be acquired: thus reason must teach us to guard our possessions and our tongue, whereas goodness and courage must be a gift of nature.

366

No matter how deeply we distrust the sincerity of our acquaintances, we always believe that they are more truthful with us than with others.

367

Few virtuous women do not find their way of life wearisome.

368

Most virtuous women are like buried treasure, secure only because they have not been discovered.

369

The pains that we inflict upon ourselves to stop loving are often crueller than those inflicted upon us by the person we love.

370

Few cowards always know the full measure of their cowardice.

371

It is almost always the fault of him who loves when he fails to realize that he is loved no longer.

372

Most young people believe that to be oafish is to be natural.

373

There are tears which will often deceive ourselves, after having first deceived others.

374

A man who thinks that he loves his mistress for her own sake is thoroughly mistaken.

375

It is the habit of mediocre minds to condemn all that is beyond their grasp.

376

True friendship destroys envy, as true love puts an end to coquetry.

377

The greatest error of penetrating minds is not to go to the limit, but beyond it.

378

We give advice but we do not inspire behaviour.

379

When our merit declines, our taste drops with it.

380

Fortune displays our virtues and vices, as light makes objects visible.

381

The pain we inflict upon ourselves in order to remain faithful to the person we love is almost equivalent to an infidelity.

382

Our actions are like rhymes: we can tack what words we please in front of them, to produce whatever meaning we may fancy.

383

The wish to talk about ourselves, and to display our defects in the light which we prefer, contributes largely to our sincerity.

384

We should only be surprised at our continued ability to feel surprise.

385

We are almost equally difficult to please when we have an abundance of love as when it has nearly all been spent.

386

No man is more frequently in error than he who cannot bear to be wrong.

387

A fool lacks the wherewithal to be good.

388

If vanity does not overthrow every virtue, at least it makes them all totter.

389

What makes vanity in others so intolerable is that it offends our own.

390

It is easier to act against one's interests than against one's tastes.

391

Fate never appears so blind as to those whom she passes by.

392

One should treat one's fate as one does one's health; enjoy it when it is good, be patient with it when it is poorly, and never attempt any drastic cure save as an ultimate resort.

393

A military career will sometimes rid a man of middle-class mannerisms: life at court, never.

394

One man can outwit another: one man cannot outwit all the others.

395

It is sometimes a lesser misfortune to be deceived by the woman we love than to be undeceived about her.

396

A woman will remain true to her first love for a long time, if she does not take a second.

397

We lack the courage to say, as a general statement, that we have no bad qualities and our enemies no good ones: yet on specific occasions we almost believe as much.

398

Of all our defects the one we find easiest to bear with is indolence: we convince ourselves that it is related to all the more peaceable virtues and that, as for the others, it does not really destroy them but merely keeps them in a state of suspended animation.

399

There is a form of eminence which is quite independent of our fate; it is an air which distinguishes us from our fellow men and makes us ap-

pear destined for great things; it is the value which we imperceptibly attach to ourselves; it is the quality which wins us the deference of others; more than birth, honours or even merit, it gives us ascendancy.

400

Merit without eminence exists; but there can be no eminence without some merit.

401

Eminence is to merit what beautiful clothes are to beautiful women.

402

The most unlikely emotion in a flirt is love.

403

Fate sometimes makes use of our faults for our advancement; and there are inconvenient people whose merit would go unrewarded, did we not willingly pay them to go elsewhere.

404

It seems that nature has hidden deep within us talents and abilities of which we are unaware:

only violent emotions can awaken them, and thus on occasion give us a surer and more accomplished viewpoint than we could ever achieve by our arts alone.

405

We reach each stage of our life completely green; and despite advancing years, we often find we lack experience.

406

Flirts pride themselves that they are jealous of their lovers: thus would they hide the envy they feel for other women.

407

When we deceive others by our wiles, we do not find our victims ridiculous: how different is our attitude towards ourselves when they outwit us.

408

The greatest ridicule that threatens old people who were once attractive is to forget that they are so no longer.

409

We should frequently be ashamed of our finest

actions were the world to see all the motives behind them.

410

The greatest act of friendship is not the revelation of our own faults, but is to help our friends recognize theirs.

411

We have few defects which are not more excusable in themselves than are the stratagems we employ to conceal them.

412

Whatever disgrace we may have earned, it is almost always within our power to re-establish our good name.

413

A man with but one form of wit will not please for long.

414

Fools and blockheads see everything through the changing glass of mood.

415

Our wit will on occasion help us to be boldly foolish.

416

Vivacity increasing with old age is not far removed from folly.

417

In love, the person who recovers first recovers best.

418

Young women who would not be taken for flirts, and old men who would not appear ridiculous, should never speak of love as though it were an activity in which they could take any part.

419

We may appear great in a station that is inferior to our talents; but we will frequently appear small, if the circumstances are reversed.

420

We frequently think to show fortitude in adversity, when in fact our state is one of prostration;

we then suffer our ills without daring to look them in the face, as a coward will let himself be killed for fear of fighting.

421

Trust contributes more to conversation than does wit.

422

All violent emotion leads us into error; but love leads us into the most ridiculous of all.

423

Few people know how to be old.

424

We boast of those defects which are the reverse of our own: when we are weak, we proudly claim that we are stubborn.

425

Acuteness of perception has a resemblance to divination which is more flattering to our vanity than all the other qualities of intellect.

426

The charm of novelty and old familiarity, contraries though they be, both prevent us from being aware of our friends' defects.

427

Most friends are enough to disgust one with friendship, as most pious people make piety quite disgusting.

428

We easily forgive our friends those defects which do not affect us.

429

A woman in love will more readily forgive a great indiscretion than a small infidelity.

430

In the last stages of love, as in the declining years of life, we live but for pain and no longer know pleasure.

431

Nothing is a greater obstacle to being natural than the desire to appear so.

432

In a way we contribute to fine deeds when we praise them whole-heartedly.

433

The surest mark of a man born with great qualities is to be born without envy.

434

If our friends have betrayed us we should treat their displays of affection with indifference; but we should always remain sensible to their misfortunes.

435

Chance and mood rule the world.

436

In the study of man it is easier to understand the species than the individual.

437

A man's merit should not be assessed by his fine qualities, but by the use to which he puts them.

438

There is a certain type of lively gratitude which not only repays our friends for benefits received, but even somehow places them in our debt for the due return that we have made them.

439

Few of our desires would be so strong, if we knew exactly what it was we wanted.

440

The reason why so few women are interested in friendship is that it tastes insipid to one who has known love.

441

In friendship, as in love, ignorance often contributes more to happiness than does knowledge.

442

We try to glory in those failings which we are unwilling to correct.

443

Our most violent passions allow us an occasional respite, but vanity will never let us rest.

444

There's no fool like an old fool.

445

Weakness, more even than vice, is virtue's enemy.

446

What makes the pangs of shame and jealousy so cruel is that vanity cannot be called in to assuage them.

447

Decorum is the pettiest discipline of all, and the one that is most observed.

448

It is easier for an upright mind to follow a warped one than to lead it straight.

449

When fate surprises us by thrusting us into a great station to which we have not gradually advanced, or of which we have not dreamed, it is wellnigh impossible to play the unexpected part and to appear worthy of our new position.

450

As our other defects slacken, pride often takes up the slack.

451

Silliness is never so tedious as when it is combined with wit.

452

No man believes that he is in every respect inferior to the man whom he admires most.

453

In public affairs skill consists less in creating situations than in profiting from those that arise.

454

We would seldom be striking an unprofitable bargain were we to renounce the good that is spoken of us on the understanding that the evil also remained unsaid.

455

Though the world may be a harsh judge, it will nevertheless more often show indulgence to false merit than injustice to true.

456

There are clever fools: there is no such thing as a discriminating fool.

457

It would be to our advantage to show ourselves as we are rather than to pretend to be what we are not.

458

Our enemies' estimate of us is closer to the truth than our own.

459

There are many remedies for love, but none is infallible.

460

We are far from knowing all the lengths to which passion can lead us.

461

Old age is a tyrant who has decreed that indulgence in the pleasures of youth shall be a capital offence.

❧ *462* ❧

Pride, which makes us censure so strongly those failings from which we are exempt, leads us also to despise those good qualities that we do not possess.

❧ *463* ❧

Pride, rather than goodness of heart, is frequently the motive that leads us to pity our enemies in their times of misfortune; we would show them that we are their superiors in thus honouring them with tokens of our sympathy.

❧ *464* ❧

Good and evil fortune can be so excessive as to surpass our sensibilities.

❧ *465* ❧

Innocence can never aspire to such powerful patronage as guilt.

❧ *466* ❧

Of all the violent passions, the least ill-becoming to a woman is love.

467

Vanity leads us to act against our inclinations more often than does reason.

468

There are evil qualities which engender great talents.

469

Our most intense desires are never inspired by reason alone.

470

All our qualities are questionable and dubious, both the good and the bad, and almost all are at the mercy of hazard.

471

In her first affair, a woman loves her lover; thenceforth she is in love with love.

472

Pride is as eccentric as the other emotions; we are ashamed to admit that we are jealous, though we will boast of our past jealousies and of our ability to be so in the future.

473

True love may be rare: true friendship is even rarer.

474

Few women's worth can survive their beauty.

475

When we confide in another, our principal motive is often a desire for sympathy or admiration.

476

Our envy always outlives the good fortune of the envied.

477

That same constancy which leads us to resist falling in love serves also to make our love violent and lasting; and those weak persons who are forever agitated by emotion are almost never really passionate.

478

It would be impossible for the imagination to invent the vast variety of contradictions that exists

naturally within the heart of every man and woman.

479

Only people who are strong can be truly gentle: what normally passes for gentleness is mere weakness, which quickly turns sour.

480

To reprove a man for timidity, in order to cure him of that defect, is a dangerous undertaking.

481

Nothing is rarer than true goodness of heart: those who believe they have it are, in most cases, only weak or eager to please.

482

Through indolence and faithfulness we confine our thought to subjects which are easy and pleasant: this practice always limits our field of knowledge: nor has any man ever taken the trouble to extend and guide his mind as far as it could go.

483

Vanity, rather than malice, is the usual source of slander.

484

A person will more readily embark on a new love when his heart is still disturbed by the ripples of the last, than when he is entirely cured of passion.

485

Those who have known great passion remain, throughout the rest of their lives, both happy and unhappy that they are cured.

486

A man without self-interest is less rare than one without envy.

487

Our minds are lazier than our bodies.

488

Our peace of mind, or its reverse, depends less on the important events that effect our lives than

on the pleasant or unpleasant sequence of those petty occurrences which form our day-to-day existence.

489

The most evil men dare not flaunt themselves as virtue's enemies: and when they would persecute it, they maintain that it is feigned, or else they impute crimes to it.

490

We may pass from love to ambition: the return journey is exceedingly rare.

491

Extreme avarice almost always defeats its own purpose: there is no passion which leads its victim farther astray, nor any which will so damage the future in the interests of the present.

492

Avarice will often produce contrary effects: thus countless people will sacrifice everything for the sake of dubious and distant expectations, while

others will ignore great future advantages in the interest of petty but immediate gain.

493

It seems that men are not satisfied with the quantity of faults with which nature has endowed them, and they therefore increase the number by certain singular affectations which they choose to adopt; they will cultivate these affectations with such care that they become in the end natural defects which are henceforth beyond their owners' power of correction.

494

A proof that men are more aware of their defects than one might suppose is the fact that they never make a mistake when discussing their own conduct: that same self-love which normally acts as blinkers now imparts a perfect clarity to their vision, so that they can suppress or disguise the slightest detail which may cause them discredit in the eyes of others.

495

Young people making their bow in the world should be embarrassed or excitable: a competent

and composed manner usually develops into impertinence.

496

Quarrels would soon be over if all the faults lay on one side.

497

For a woman, to be young without being beautiful is as useless as beauty without youth.

498

There are persons so ephemeral and frivolous that they can no more have true defects than solid virtues.

499

A woman's first affair is not normally held against her, until she embarks upon her second.

500

There are people so preoccupied with themselves that when they fall in love they manage to be completely engrossed in their own emotions and not at all in the object of their affections.

501

Love, agreeable though it be, gives more pleasure by the manner of its revealing than by itself.

502

Less wit and an upright mind are, in the long run, not so boring as more wit and a twisted one.

503

Jealousy is the greatest of all evils, and the one which inspires least pity in those who cause it,

504

Having spoken of the falsity of so many apparent virtues, it is now time to say a few words concerning the falsity inherent in the contempt of death: I refer to that contempt which the pagans claimed to derive from their own inner strength, and without the hope of a better future life. There is a difference between being steadfastly reconciled to dying and despising death. The former is not unusual: but I do not believe that the latter is ever sincere. Nevertheless. everything imaginable

has been written in the attempt to prove that death is by no means an evil; and the weakest of men, as well as the heroes of the past, have given us a thousand examples to reinforce such argument. However, I doubt if any man of sense has ever believed it; and the trouble one takes to persuade others, and oneself, that one does, is itself proof of how incredible it is. We may find certain aspects of life nauseating, but that is no reason to despise death. Even those who inflict it upon themselves, even voluntary suicides, do not treat it as a negligible matter, and will be shocked into resisting it just like others should death come to them in some manner not of their own choosing. The innumerable degrees of courage that we see in men of valour derive from the fact that each envisages death differently, and that on some occasions its presence is more clearly felt than on others. From this it follows that a man who will despise what he does not know, will learn to fear what he understands. If we are not to consider death the greatest of all evils, we must at all times avoid looking it straight in the face. The cleverest and the bravest men are those who adopt the most honourable stratagems to avoid its contemplation; but any man who sees it for what it is, knows that it is a frightful thing. The inevitability of death was the sole cause of the philosophers' steadfastness. They believed that a journey which cannot be avoided should be made with good grace; and since they could not be

immortal, they would stop at nothing to make their reputations eternal and thus save from the shipwreck what might yet be saved. Let us preserve our dignity by not telling ourselves all that we think on this subject, and let us trust in our temperament, rather than in feeble arguments which would teach us that we can face death with indifference. The desire to die bravely, the hope of being regretted, the wish to leave a splendid name behind us, the certainty of being freed from the miseries of life and the hazards of fortune, these are palliatives which should not be rejected; but we must not assume that they are infallible remedies. They offer us as much mental protection as a simple hedgerow will give physical cover to a soldier moving up in battle. In the distance such a hedgerow seems security itself, but when he reaches it the soldier finds that it is indeed a flimsy defence. We are deceiving ourselves if we imagine that death, when it comes close, will appear as we envisaged it when it was still remote, or that our feelings, weak as they are, will find the strength not to be affected by this harshest of all trials. It is also to misjudge the effects of self-love if we think that it can be of the slightest assistance to us in dismissing as negligible what must inevitably lead to its own annihilation; and our reason, in whose resources we have such faith, is too feeble at such a testing time to persuade us of what we would wish to believe. On the contrary, reason is

the most common traitor, for instead of inspiring us with a contempt for death, it now reveals to us all its horrors and terrors. All it can do for us is advise us to avert our eyes and look elsewhere. Cato and Brutus chose noble subjects for such contemplation. Recently a flunkey was pleased to dance upon the scaffold where he was to be broken on the wheel. Though the motives may differ, the effect is the same; and wide though the gulf be between great and little men, we have seen a thousand examples of their similarity when it comes to dying. But there is always this difference: whereas great men, in the contempt they would assume for death, are saved from staring it straight in the face by their love of glory which they interpose, the common people are spared by their own stupidity from realizing the magnitude of the calamity, and are thus free to think of other things.

PART II

The posthumously published and the suppressed maxims

The maxims here numbered 505 to 532 were first published in the posthumous edition of Claude Barbin, Paris, 1693.

505

Many a man would be pious: none would be humble.

506

Physical labour mitigates mental anguish, and that is why the poor are happy.

507

The worst pains are those which we must suffer in secret, for vanity makes the others tolerable.

508

The altar upon which God would have us offer Him sacrifice is humility.

509

The sage needs little to be happy, but nothing can satisfy a fool. This is why almost all men are miserable.

510

In our torments to achieve happiness it is the appearance that we pursue rather than the reality.

511

It is far easier to extinguish an initial desire than to gratify all its successors.

512

Wisdom is to the soul as health is to the body.

513

Since it is not within the power of great men to bestow either physical health or spiritual tranquillity, all those benefits of which they do dispose are always paid for at an inflated price.

514

Before we desire anything strongly, we should study the degree of happiness of its present owner.

515

A true friend is the greatest of boons, and the one we think least of acquiring.

516

A lover will not notice his mistress's defects until they have ceased to enchant him.

517

Caution and love do not go together. As love increases, caution fades away.

518

A husband will sometimes appreciate jealousy in his wife, for he will then hear her constantly talking of that which he loves.

519

How much to be pitied is a virtuous woman in love!

520

It is more advantageous for a wise man to avoid the fight than to win the day.

521

Men should be studied more closely than books.

522

Happiness or misery are usually bestowed upon those who already have an abundance of the one or the other.

523

A virtuous woman is a treasure trove; he who has found one would do well not to boast of his discovery.

524

We only criticize ourselves in order to win the praise of others.

525

The company of those we bore is almost always boring.

526

If we love to excess, it is hard to realize when we are no longer loved in return.

527

Never is it more difficult to talk well than when we are ashamed to remain silent.

528

Nothing is more natural, nor more deceptive, than the belief that one is loved.

529

We would rather meet those to whom we have done a kindness than those from whom we have received one.

530

It is harder to disguise the feelings we have than to feign those that we do not have.

531

A mended friendship must be handled with greater care than one that has never been broken.

532

A man who cares for no one is far more unfortunate than he whom nobody likes.

The maxims here numbered 533 to 553 were included in the edition *Les Grands Ecrivains de la France*, Hachette, Paris, 1868-1883.

533

The world is full of pots calling kettles black.

534

Those who set too high a price upon their nobility set too low a price on how that nobility first was won.

535

In order to punish man for his original sin, God has allowed him to deify his love of self, so that he may be tormented thereby throughout his entire life.

536

The soul of self-love is self-interest, and just as the body, when the soul is gone, can neither see, nor hear, nor know, nor feel, nor move, so self-love, when self-interest is, as it were, separated from it, is likewise incapable of sight, of hearing,

of sensation and of movement. This explains why a man who will hasten across oceans and continents in pursuit of his own interests becomes suddenly paralysed when it is the interests of others that are at stake: hence the sudden weariness, the glassy stare that afflict all those to whom we are relating our own affairs: hence, too, the sudden return of animation when, in our disquisition, we at last touch on something which is of personal concern to them as well. To conclude, conversation or dissertation reveals how a man can quickly fall into a stupor, or be with equal speed revived therefrom, in exact accordance with the degree to which the matters under discussion do or do not affect his own self-interest.

537

It seems that the devil has deliberately stationed laziness to guard the frontiers of many a virtue.

538

What makes it so easy for us to believe that others have defects is the facility we have for believing in that which we wish to be true.

539

The cure for jealousy is to know with certainty

what one has hitherto feared; it is a cruel remedy, yet it is still kinder than doubt and suspicion.

540

Hope and fear are inseparable. There is no hope without fear, nor any fear without hope.

541

We should not be resentful when others hide the truth from us, since we so often conceal it from ourselves.

542

The ending of good is evil, and the ending of evil is good.

543

The reason why people often resent those maxims which lay bare the heart of man is the fear lest their own hearts be revealed.

544

A neighbour's ruination is a source of pleasure both to his friends and to his enemies.

545

The power exercised over us by those whom we love is almost always greater than that which we exercise over ourselves.

546

We readily criticize the defects of others, but we seldom take this opportunity to correct these defects in ourselves.

547

A truly wretched man is he who devotes all his energies to the gratification of his passions, and so must groan ceaselessly beneath their yoke. He cannot endure their fury, nor yet the violence he must do to himself in order to throw off their tyranny. Disgusted by his vices, he is also nauseated by the remedies against them. He can endure neither the pains of sickness nor the rigours of cure.

548

We are affected by good or evil fortune according to the degree of our sensibility, not of its abundance.

549

We praise only for profit.

550

Our passions are but the varying fancies of self-love.

551

In the extremity of boredom we are no longer bored.

552

In most matters our approval or our criticism is bestowed according to the fashion of the day.

553

For women, hell is to grow old.

The maxims here numbered 554 to 563 were printed in the edition of 1664, I. and D. Steucker, La Haye, but were omitted from the subsequent editions produced during the author's lifetime.

554

The Almighty has endowed man with a variety of talents, just as He has planted the landscape with a variety of trees: and each talent, like each tree, has its particular qualities and produces its own especial fruit. Thus the finest pear-tree in the world is incapable of bearing the most ordinary apple, while the most sublime of talents cannot produce the same effects as common ones. A further result is that the man who would make maxims without possessing the seed of truth is as absurd as he who expects to find tulips growing in his beds without having first planted the bulbs.

555

We always fear as mortals, but we always desire as though we were immortal.

556

We are often prevented from truly appreciating aphorisms which disprove the purity of the virtues by our eagerness to believe that in our own case, at least, these are quite unalloyed.

557

To be sly is a poor substitute for being clever.

558

The philosophers only condemn wealth because we abuse it. It is up to us to acquire and employ riches virtuously, for they merely nourish and increase vice in the same way that logs feed a fire. We can devote our wealth to all the virtues, and indeed make them both more pleasant and more impressive by so doing.

559

Great and ambitious men are more unhappy than their mediocre fellows, for less is needed to satisfy the latter than the former.

560

A convincing proof that man was not created as he now is, lies in the fact that the more reasonable he becomes, the more embarrassed he is by the extravagance, the baseness and the corruption of his own feelings and desires.

561

If the desire to preserve and the fear of loss were to be eliminated from what is called the exercise of power, there would be precious little left.

562

Familiarity is a relaxation of almost all the rules which govern civilized life: it has been introduced into society by the libertines with the intention of making us feel what they call more "comfortable." It is a product of that self-love which would adjust all to our own weaknesses by making us no longer subject to the honourable discipline imposed by good manners; and in its effort to make manners as easy as possible, it degrades them to the level of vices.

Women, being by nature more pliable than men, are more quickly affected by such a relaxation, and have also more to lose thereby: the authority of woman is no longer maintained: the respect due to her sex is diminished: and one might say that in the process a virtuous woman forfeits the greater part of her rights.

563

To tease a man, in fun, is an agreeable form of wit which enlivens conversation and creates a pleasant social atmosphere, if it is well done, but which has quite the contrary effect if it is not. Anyhow it is more agreeable to tease than to be teased. This style of amusement is always a conflict of wit, a product of vanity: hence the fact that those who lack the wit to hold their own in

banter are as offended by teasing as they would be were they made to blush by having some defect of character pointed out to them in public, and indeed will regard being worsted at banter as an unforgiveable injury. Undiluted, it is a poison which destroys friendship and breeds hatred: but tempered with charm, flattery and praise, it will win and keep friends. Finally, banter should be employed with circumspection both towards those of whom we are fond and towards the weak.

The maxims here numbered 564 to 614 were printed in the edition of 1665, Claude Barbin, Paris, but were omitted from the subsequent editions produced during the author's lifetime.

564

Self-love is the love of oneself and of everything else only for oneself; it makes men into self-idolaters who would tyrannize over others if fortune gave them the means to do so; it can never be at rest away from itself, and when it does settle upon impersonal objects its action is like that of the bee

which lights upon the blossom only that it may suck nourishment from it.

Nothing is more violent than the desires of self-love, nothing more deep-laid than its designs, nothing more skilful than its manoeuvres; its subtleties are beyond description, its transformations are more than metamorphoses, its combinations are elaborate beyond those of chemistry. Its depths cannot be plumbed, the mists which lurk in its chasms cannot be pierced. In those abysses, hidden from the sharpest eye, it carries out unseen a thousand marches and counter-marches; unseen even by itself it there engenders, feeds and raises a host of loves and hatreds of which it is itself unaware; among its brood are some so monstrous that, when at last they are revealed by the light of day, their parent fails to recognize them or at least refuses to accept them as its progeny. In the obscurity that envelopes self-love are born those ridiculous convictions which it cherishes about itself: from that murk derive the errors, the ignorance, the crude and foolish ideas which it conceives concerning its own nature. Thence springs its belief that its passions are dead when they do but slumber, that it has withdrawn from the race the moment it is no longer in motion, that it has abandoned lusts which are merely satiated.

But this thick miasma in which it hides from itself does not at all prevent it from observing the external world with perfect clarity, and in this it

resembles our eyes which can see everything save only themselves. Indeed, when its interests are truly aroused, when matters of real importance are at stake and the violence of its aspirations require its full attention, then it sees, it feels, it hears, it imagines, it suspects, it penetrates all; so that one is tempted to believe that each of its passions has its own specific magical powers. Nothing is tighter nor stronger than its attachments, which it vainly attempts to snap when faced with immediate and irremediable disaster. Nevertheless on occasion it can speedily and without any effort achieve that which it was incapable of doing for years on end, try though it might. And from this one may fairly deduce, with considerable probability, that its desires are the result of spontaneous combustion, rather than of the inflamation created by the beauty or value of the desired objects; that its own desire is the high price which it ascribes to their worth and the tinsel with which it embellishes their charm; that it is itself which it pursues, and that it is chasing its own liking when it chases that which is to its liking.

It is the totality of contradiction, being imperious and obedient, sincere and false, compassionate and cruel, timid and brave. Its inclinations vary according to the diversities of its temperament so that it turns and cleaves to, now glory, now riches, now pleasures. The objects of its desire change with age, station and experience. But it is

of no importance whether it has one object or several, since it is itself capable of subdivision and again of cohesion when such action seems to it either necessary or desirable.

It is faithless, and in addition to those infidelities brought about by external factors, it gives birth to a multitude of additional inconstancies by a process of parthenogenesis: its faithfulness comes of fickleness, superficiality, love, a taste for novelty, lassitude, disgust.

It is capricious, and at times can be observed to labour with the utmost diligence and incredible perseverance to obtain that which can be of no advantage and may indeed be actively harmful to it, but for which it continues to strive because that is what it wants. It is bizarre, and will often exert all its energy for some totally frivolous end, will relish the most insipid pleasures and will preserve its pride in the most contemptible undertakings.

It is to be met with in all stages of life and among all conditions of men; it lives everywhere; it feeds on everything; and it feeds on nothing. It can adjust itself to all circumstances and, equally, to a change of circumstance. It will even be found among the ranks of those who are its declared foes, and it can be seen seated at their council table. And what is most remarkable is that, in their company, it will hate itself, it will plot its own overthrow, it will strive for its own ruination; for it cares only

that it should exist, and so long as it continues to be it is quite willing to do so as its own enemy. It is therefore no cause for surprise that it is on occasion to be observed in alliance with the strictest austerity, nor that it will set out with this strange companion for the purpose of its own destruction; it makes no difference, for at the moment when it is driven back and defeated in one corner of the field, it will be advancing victoriously in another. When we believe that it has abandoned one of its pastimes, it is in fact merely in a state of suspended animation, or else its desires have become directed elsewhere. And when we think to have routed it at last, we will discover it still glorying in its own defeat.

Such is the portrait of self-love, which is but one continual agitation throughout the whole of man's life. It may justly be compared to the ocean which is never still, and in the constant advance and withdrawal of the waves we see a true reflexion of self-love's restless imagination and eternal turbulence.

565

All our passions mark but the varying temperatures of the blood.

566

Moderation in good fortune is only dread of the

shame that follows excess, or fear of losing that which we have.

567

Moderation in life is like moderation at table: we should like to eat more, but do not wish to have a stomach ache.

568

Each man criticizes others for those defects which others criticize in him.

569

Pride, wearied as it were by artifice and tired of its own masquerades after it has played every role in the human comedy, will at last throw aside the mask and reveal itself in arrogance. Thus one might truly say that arrogance is the pomp and pronouncement of pride.

570

It is a sort of happiness to know just how unhappy one should be.

571

A man who cannot find tranquillity within himself will search for it in vain elsewhere.

572

A man must be able to guarantee what fate will do to him before he can guarantee what he himself will do.

573

Love is to the soul of the lover as that soul is to the body it animates.

574

The justice of a temperate judge is but his love of his own eminence.

575

The first reaction of joy that we experience at our friends' good fortune comes neither from our own innate goodness nor from the affection which we have for them; rather is it the product of self-love which flatters us with the hope that our turn soon will come, or that we may perchance derive some benefit from our friends' luck.

576

We always discover, in the misfortunes of our dearest friends, something not altogether displeasing.

577

As though it were not enough that self-love has the talent of changing its form and nature, it possesses the further ability of transforming objects external to itself. It does this in the most astonishing fashion, for not only can it disguise them so skilfully that it is itself deceived, but it can even alter their very condition and quality. Thus when a person is our enemy and hates or persecutes us, our self-love will judge that person with the utmost severity of the law, assigning to his weaknesses the dimensions of enormity, and picking out his good qualities in so nauseating a light that these become even more repulsive than his defects. But, lo! the moment this same person becomes favourably inclined towards us, or some interest of ours necessitates a reconciliation, we will quite spontaneously restore to his virtues that lustrous glow of which our dislike had so recently deprived them: his evil qualities vanish, and his good ones are impressively revealed: so great is our indulgence that it will even compel us to find reasons to justify this person's former hostility towards us.

Although all the passions bear witness to the

truth of this, none does so as plainly as love. We can observe a lover, enraged by his mistress's forgetfulness or infidelity, contemplating by way of vengeance the most extreme acts of violence that passion can inspire. Yet no sooner is he with her once again, and the sight of her has calmed his seething fury, than the enchantment she exercises over him acquits such beauty of all guilt, it is only himself who is now to blame, and it is his past condemnation of her that he condemns. The miraculous powers of transformation of self-love have thus whitened his mistress's blackest misdeeds, and have exonerated her of all blame, which he now willingly accepts for himself.

❧ 578 ❧

The most dangerous effect of pride is that it is blinding to men. As pride grows, this blindness increases, until we become incapable of recognizing those remedies which would alleviate our misfortunes or cure us of our defects.

❧ 579 ❧

A man has lost his reason when he despairs of encountering reason in others.

580

The philosophers, and Seneca above all others, in no wise pulverized crime with their moral precepts: they simply used crime as a building material in the edifice of their own pride.

581

The wisest of men will prove their wisdom in insignificant affairs, but almost never in matters of the first importance.

582

The most subtle folly is compounded of the most subtle wisdom.

583

Temperance is the love of health, or the inability to overindulge.

584

The surest way to forget something is to become tired of talking about it.

585

It is only through self-interest that we condemn vice and praise virtue.

586

The praise that we receive serves at least to encourage us in the practice of virtue.

587

We do not distinguish between the various species of anger. Yet there is one that is ephemeral and wellnigh innocent, which comes of a hot temper: while there is another that is extremely wicked, and which can be described as the fury of pride.

588

Great souls are not those which are swayed less by passion and more by virtue than small ones, but simply those that are animated by greater designs.

589

Cruelty in man is less often the result of natural ferocity than of self-love.

590

The Italian poet's remark about the virtue of women can be applied to all our virtues: that they are often no more than the art of appearing virtuous.

591

Man is incapable of either good or evil in excess.

592

Those who are incapable of committing great crimes will not easily suspect others of so doing.

593

Funeral pomp is directed more towards the vanity of the living than the honouring of the dead.

594

No matter how uncertain and various this world may appear, we can nevertheless observe certain hidden balances and certain fixed laws laid down for all time by Providence, which do make all things proceed in their proper order and follow the course of their particular destiny.

595

The conspirator must be bold, but courage alone will give all the firmness needed to face the perils of battle.

596

Those who would ascribe a genealogy to Victory are tempted, like the poet, to call her the daughter of Heaven, since we cannot detect her parentage here on earth. In fact she is the product of an infinity of deeds which, far from being intended to result in her creation, are solely concerned with the particular interests of those who perform them. An army will collectively win a great and general victory when each individual soldier is simply concerned with his own glory and repute.

597

No man can be sure of his own courage until he has stared danger in the face.

598

Imitation is always unfortunate, and the counterfeit is disagreeable in the exact measure that the original is pleasing.

599

It is very hard to distinguish between that goodness of heart which is generosity to all men, and extreme cleverness.

600

If we would always be good, others must believe that they can never do us an injury with impunity.

601

The certainty of pleasing is often an infallible means of displeasing.

602

The confidence a man has in himself will engender the greater part of that which he inspires in others.

603

The revolution of time reverses our intellectual tastes just as it alters our worldly fortune.

604

Truth is the foundation and the logic of perfection and of beauty: no matter what its nature, nothing can be beautiful nor perfect if it be not truly all that it should be and if it have not all that it should have.

605

There are beautiful objects which are the more striking for being in a state of imperfection, and which would suffer from being too fully achieved.

606

Magnanimity is pride's noble effort to make man his own master so that he may master all.

607

Luxury and excessive polish are, in all nations, the sure sign of impending decadence. For each man being then preoccupied with his own interests, none will have regard for the public good.

608

Of all our emotions, laziness is the one of which we are ourselves least aware. It is also the most intense and malignant of them all, though its violence be imperceptible and the damage it cause remain very well hidden. If we examine its power with care, we shall see that there is no occasion when it does not dominate our feelings, our interests and our pleasures: it is a great sucking-fish which can seize and hold fast the tallest of ships, and it is those doldrums more perilous to a great vessel upon a journey of consequence than either reef or hurricane. The tranquillity of laziness has hidden charms wherewith to beguile the soul, and under its influence we will discontinue our most ardent pursuits and abandon our most stubborn resolutions. Finally, to give a true picture of this passion, it must be said that it resembles a beatitude of spirit, reconciling the soul for all that it has lost and being in itself a substitute for every good.

609

It is easier to fall in, than out of, love.

610

Most women give themselves through weakness

rather than through passion. This explains why persistent men are usually more successful in such matters than their fellows, though they be in no way more attractive.

611

In love, a sure way to be loved is hardly to love at all.

612

The sincerity, with which a lover and his mistress will ask one another to say as soon as he or she is in love no longer, is far less inspired by the wish to be told when the other's love shall have ceased as by the desire to be the more firmly assured that one is still loved, until one is informed of the contrary.

613

That which love most resembles is a fever: we have no more mastery over the one than the other, and can control neither its violence nor its duration.

614

The cleverest course for people who are not clever is to know that they must follow the wise guidance of others.

The maxims here numbered 615 to 627 were printed in the edition of 1675, Claude Barbin, Paris but were omitted from the edition of 1678, the last to be published in the author's lifetime.

615

Since nobody is free to love or to stop loving, a lover cannot justly complain of his mistress's inconstancy nor she of his fickleness.

616

When we weary of loving we are only too glad to become the victim of infidelity, since we are thereby freed from the shackles of our own faithfulness.

617

How can we expect another to keep our secret, if we cannot keep it ourself?

618

Kings make men as they mint coins: they decree the value of both: and we are compelled to accept them according to that valuation and not at their true worth.

619

There are crimes which are rendered innocuous and even glorious by their brilliance, their number and their excess. This explains why the theft of public moneys is regarded as clever and why the unjust seizure of the territories of others is dignified with the name of conquest.

620

It is easier to set limits to one's gratitude than to one's hopes or desires.

621

We do not always regret the loss of a friend because of the high opinion we had of his merit: we sorrow because we need him and the high opinion he had of us.

622

We enjoy seeing through others: we do not enjoy it when others see through us.

623

To preserve one's health by too strict a regimen is in itself a tedious malady.

624

Nobody is more of a nuisance to his fellows than a lazy man; as soon as he has achieved a satisfactory state of idleness, he will pester everyone in order to give the semblance of intense activity.

625

When we fail to notice the cooling of our friends' affection we prove how slight is our affection for them.

626

We are always afraid to meet our true love when we have been flirting elsewhere.

627

We should be reconciled to our defects, once we have found the strength to admit to them.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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Together with a Note on This Translation

1

THOSE who are interested in the full bibliography of the *Maxims,* a complicated problem, are advised to read Jean Marchand's authoritative study, *Bibliographie Générale Raisonnée de La Rochefoucauld*, Paris, L. Giraud-Badin, 1948, pages 108-296. The following information is extracted from this most scholarly work.

There were six principal editions during the author's lifetime, as well as two after his death which contained new, authentic material. They are as follows:

1. *The so-called "Hague" edition, 1664.* This edition, the first and a pirate, "Jean and Daniel Steucker, the Hague," was in fact printed by the Elzevirs on their presses at Leyden. It contains 189 maxims. Ten of these were later broken up by the author into two or more parts, while six appear as three in the French editions. Thus this pirate edition contains what later became 197 maxims. Ten of these

were not reprinted by the author in his lifetime, but are here translated and numbered 554 to 563.

2. *The "First" Edition, Paris, Claude Barbin, 1665.* The duc de la Rochefoucauld, to protect his property, arranged for the publication of this edition. It contains an unsigned preface, probably by Henri de Besse, 316 maxims, the essay on death (in this translation given as Maxim No. 504), and an index of subject matters. This edition was reprinted, with minor alterations most of which were by the author, twice during the year. It is one of these later impressions which contains the *Avis au Lecteur*, which, though unsigned, was written or inspired by the author and in which it is stated that publication is due to the pirated edition being printed in, and circulated from, Holland.

3. *The "Second" edition, of 1666, Paris, Claude Barbin.* This authorized edition contains only 302 maxims, including the essay on death, fifteen being thus cut out. It also contains a new *Avis au Lecteur.* There are numerous alterations to the text of the previous edition, but in no case are the principal maxims affected, that is to say those which constitute the key to his thought. He has not modified his views on courage, humility, gratitude, love or friendship. But in the maxims dealing with what might be called the minor aspects of life, such as the love of justice, generosity and loyalty, he has frequently toned down his maxims by the insertion of words or phrases: *"often,"* or *"usually"* or *"with most men."*

In this edition the short essay on self-love, here translated as Maxim No. 564, was omitted. It had served as the introduction to the first edition: he had doubtless realized that such explanation was no longer necessary and that the other maxims made his point quite clearly enough.

4. *The "Third" edition, of 1671, Paris, Claude Barbin.* This contains 341 maxims, or 39 more than the previous edition, all of which was here reprinted. Some of the modifying phrases and words added to the previous edition were now taken out again. In particular, the maxims dealing with love and womankind are both more numerous and sharper in tone.

5. *The "Fourth" edition, of 1675, Paris, Claude Barbin.* The maxims of the previous edition, with some alterations, were here reprinted, together with a further seventy-two new ones, making a total of 413. The tendency is here the same as in the previous edition. Women and love are treated harshly. Many of the new maxims deal with the part that fate plays in our actions. This edition contained also, for the first time, a maxim to which La Rochefoucauld must have attached great importance, since he made it the epigraph of the whole collection. It is reproduced as such in this translation.

6. *The "Fifth" edition of 1678, Paris, Claude Barbin.* This was the last edition to be published in La Rochefoucauld's lifetime and is generally regarded as the authoritative text. It contains 504

maxims. With two small exceptions—which will be mentioned in the translator's note opposite— it is the maxims in this form that have been here translated. It contained more than a hundred new maxims, while others printed in previous editions were eliminated. Many of these new maxims deal with old age and with the affectations of youth. The alterations to the previously printed maxims were in general purely stylistic.

7. *The "Sixth" edition, of 1693, Paris, Claude Barbin.* This, the most important posthumous one, was apparently arranged by Jean de Segrais, Madame de Lafayette's secretary, and contains fifty new maxims, though twenty-one of these are only variants on maxims already published in earlier editions. It is not known quite what the condition of this new edition was at the time of the author's death, whether he had been working on it, or whether Segrais and the printer simply found these maxims among his papers. Some of them, at least, do not appear to have been perfected, while others are of the highest order. Those printed in this édition for the first time, or reprinted after being omitted from the "Fifth" edition, are here translated as Nos. 505 to 532.

8. *Eighteenth Century editions.* Various editions were produced throughout the century containing maxims which were either certainly not written by La Rochefoucauld or of which the authorship is in doubt. By 1714 editions containing over seven

hundred maxims were being printed. Many of these were certainly not by the alleged author.

9. *The Hachette edition.* In the, to date authoratative, edition published by Hachette in the series *Les Grands Ecrivains de la France*, Paris, 1868-1883, a further twenty-one maxims were considered or known to be sufficiently well authenticated for inclusion. Those are here translated as Nos. 533 to 553.

2

In translating these maxims I have attempted to give the author's meaning, as I understand it, as clearly as possible in the English of our day. This has raised an immediate problem to which there is perhaps no fully satisfactory solution. Certain words of La Rochefoucauld's, such as *honnête homme*, have no exact counterpart in current English: on occasion this phrase may be rendered as "gentleman," but not always, for sometimes, as I understand the maxims, it is closer to man-of-the-world, man of honour, or even "proper man." I must therefore apologize for an apparent inconsistency in my translation. Another such occurs with his celebrated *amour-propre,* a word which in French has, ever since La Rochefoucauld's day, borne the exact meaning which he gave to it. While "self-love" or egoism will at times express this concept, at others, and particularly in the earlier maxims, I have preferred self-esteem, conceit, or other quasi-synonyms. Again

I apologize for this inconsistency. My excuse is my belief that an attempt to give an accurate rendition of La Rochefoucauld's ideas was a more worthwhile undertaking than strict adherence to pedantic uniformity. I trust that English readers will approve of this decision.

As already stated, this translation is based on the text of the "Fifth" edition, with two small exceptions. Maxim No. 65, in the earlier editions, was given as it is here translated. In the "Fifth" edition half the maxim was omitted, to read: *"Foresight has been extolled in the highest terms. Yet it is no safeguard against even the smallest eventualities."* Since this alteration deprives the maxim of much of its point, I am inclined to wonder whether the change was made by La Rochefoucauld or whether it was perhaps the printer's doing. In any event, the earlier text seems to me so superior that I have retained it. In Maxim No. 273 the text in the "Fifth" edition begins: *"There are things, approved of in the world. . . ."* Previous editions had given: *"There are people. . . ."* Since the later version seems to me nonsense—for only people can have vices, after all—I have preferred the earlier one.

One final point concerns punctuation. Our conventions in this matter are not quite the same as those which prevailed in France three centuries ago. I have therefore not hesitated to alter the punctuation when such alteration seemed to me to give more exactly the cadence of the author's ideas.

Lastly I should like to express my gratitude to Professor Jean Seznec, Maréchal Foch Professor of French in the University of Oxford, who has very kindly read this translation and has greatly helped me with his advice.

SACOMB'S ASH, 1956